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ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
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Grassroot Networks as a Pathway to Gender Equality: The case of Student-Led Networks in Addis Ababa University Main Campus

BY

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A thesis submitted to College of Development Studies- Center for Gender studies of Addis Ababa University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Art in Gender Studies.

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ADDIS ABABA

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this is my own thesis work and has not been presented in full or partly by any other person or group in any way or in any form for a degree in any other university, and to the researcher's knowledge, all materials used as a source for this purpose have been appropriately acknowledged.

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ACCRONYMS

| | |
|---------|---|
| AU- | African Union |
| AWID- | Association for Women's Right in Development |
| CEDAW- | Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| DEVAW- | Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against women |
| CSO- | Civil Society Organization |
| DEVAW- | Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women |
| EPRDF- | Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front |
| FSA- | Female Students' Association |
| GBV- | Gender Based Violence |
| HDI – | Human Development Index |
| IESALC- | International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean |
| KLCC- | Kellogg Leadership for Community Change |
| MDGs- | Millennium Development Goals |
| MOWCY- | Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs |
| MSC- | Male Solidarity Club |
| NAP-GE- | National Action Plan for Gender Equality |
| N.d- | No Date |
| POA- | Plan of Action |
| SLN- | Student-Led Networks |
| SVSH- | Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment |
| UN- | United Nations |
| UNDP- | United Nations Development Program |
| UNHCR- | UN high commissioner for refugees |
| UNICEF- | United Nations Institute for Culture and Education Fund |
| UNESCO- | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| WHO- | World health Organization |
| YM- | Yellow Movement |

Abstract

This study examines how grassroots student-led networks can be a pathway to achieve gender equality. The study focuses on three purposively selected grassroots student-led networks and analyzes their hierarchical and flat structures, decision-making practices, and gender role stereotypes. The study also investigates how these networks identify themselves as feminists and gender justice activists. The results show that although these networks face internal and external challenges, they have the potential to serve as a pathway for the realization of gender equality if they receive technical and financial support from various stakeholders. The study concludes that grassroots student-led networks are prudent task forces that challenge the fundamental constructs of gender inequality at the grass root level.

Key Terms: social identity, self-identification, student-led network, collective action, pathway, gender equality, equity/welfare, feminism.

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The exploration of student-led networks as catalysts for gender equality within academic institutions, particularly in the context of Addis Ababa University (AAU), delves into a pivotal realm of social dynamics and advocacy. This research stems from the recognition that student-led networks wield substantial influence in shaping campus culture, fostering inclusivity, and advocating for socio-cultural change. As gender equality remains a pertinent global goal, examining the roles played by these networks in promoting gender equity within AAU provides a nuanced understanding of their impact on societal transformation.

Addis Ababa University, as a bastion of higher education in Ethiopia, represents a microcosm of society, where diverse student-led networks operate. These networks, comprising groups like the Female Students Association (FSA), Male Solidarity Club (MSC), and the Yellow Movement (YM), are instrumental in fostering dialogue, advocacy, and actions geared towards gender equality and women's empowerment. The intersectional nature of gender issues within academic spaces, encompassing disparities in representation, access to resources, and social norms, underscores the significance of investigating how these networks navigate and address such complexities.

Against the backdrop of Ethiopia's commitment to gender equality and empowerment, as enshrined in its national policies and international obligations, this research seeks to unravel the mechanisms and strategies employed by student-led networks within AAU. Understanding their organizational structures, leadership practices, initiatives, and engagement with campus-wide stakeholders provides critical insights into their effectiveness as agents of change in advancing gender parity and inclusivity. By focusing on the FSA, MSC, and YM, this study aims to dissect their roles, challenges, successes, and collaborative efforts towards creating an equitable and inclusive campus environment.

The research is not merely an academic pursuit but holds pragmatic implications for policy formulation, institutional frameworks, and grassroots activism. Unveiling the intricate tapestry of

student-led networks' contributions to gender equality within AAU is foundational for informing interventions, fostering collaborations, and amplifying best practices, thereby contributing to the wider discourse on gender equity within educational institutions and society at large.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The prevalence of gender inequality in Ethiopia persists despite constitutional efforts and the existence of gender equality action plans. While these initiatives exist, women's rights groups encounter impediments in effectively combating these disparities. Concurrently, within higher education institutions like Addis Ababa University (AAU), college students have initiated endeavors to address gender-based violence (GBV) and societal injustices, yet a significant gap exists in scholarly literature. There remains a scarcity of documented roles and contributions of grassroots student-led networks in supporting GBV survivors and conducting awareness-raising activities.

"Institutional support is not forthcoming for these networks, often rooted in apprehension of potential maladministration consequences, hindering the functionality and impact of student-led initiatives," (Anonymous Academician).

The underrepresentation of grassroots student-led networks' contributions in combating gender inequality and supporting survivors of GBV within academic settings poses a critical research gap. This dearth of literature limits a comprehensive understanding of the pivotal roles these networks play in advocating for gender equality and addressing societal injustices. This gap in research undermines the exploration of pathways through which these student-led networks, such as the Female Students Association (FSA), Male Solidarity Club (MSC), and Yellow Movement (YM) within AAU, influence gender equity and societal change.

Consequently, this research problem seeks to investigate and illuminate the multifaceted roles, contributions, and challenges encountered by grassroots student-led networks within AAU. By examining the effectiveness, limitations, and perceptions surrounding these networks' initiatives, this study aims to bridge the gap in literature, thereby offering valuable insights into the transformative potential of student-led activism as a pathway to gender equality and social justice.

Research findings have shown that campus-based student-led organizations are important in coordinating student-to-student support and fearlessly challenging campus maladministration and misconducts. The University of Zimbabwe provides evidence of the importance of student-led networks as a pathway to gender equality by tackling hindrances. Female Students Network Trust (FSNT) is a prime example of a student-led network that fearlessly combats sexual violence and other social injustices and has established survivor support mechanisms. Consistent with this assertion, Gizaw (2014) also asserted that student-based associations are very important in creating awareness of reproductive health problems that students may face in the university in the Ethiopian context.

There is a dearth of literature revolving around student-led networks' roles and contributions on campus in dealing with a variety of social issues in Ethiopia. And again, if studied, only little parts of student-led networks are addressed. A good example in such cases, as Addisalem (2020) stated, is the Yellow Movement, one of the student networks, which has been relentlessly supporting female students in different ways, including awareness-raising, financial aid, legal support, and empowerment. In spite of the commitments by student networks, there is still a need for more research to be conducted on the roles and contributions of student-led networks on campus.

1.3. Research Questions

The study will possibly answer these questions:

1. What are the institutional setups and practices of students' networks like?
2. What are their achievements?
3. What challenges they face while executing their tasks?
4. How do they cope with those challenges

1.4 Main Objective:

The main objective of this thesis work is:

- To examine the potential role of grass root student-led networks in relation to advancing gender equality issues using AAU- Main Campus as a case study.

1.4.1. Specific Objectives:

The specific objectives of this study are:

- To assess the institutional set ups and practices of students' networks
- To explore students' networks' major achievements
- To explore challenges that students' networks face
- To assess the strategies students' networks employ to cope with challenges

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study argues that the student-led networks can serve as a pathway to gender equality. This study is useful as follows: First, the institution takes some input from the findings and possibly revises some institutional policies and guidelines to the level that gender issues are properly identified and addressed. Second, student-led networks make advantage of the findings that they review and reframe their organizational set ups, objectives, strategies, and activities from a gender perspective more effectively. Third, since grass root collectives are under-researched here before, it brings these initiatives to the attention of policy makers and donor agencies who are interested in gender equality efforts. More importantly, knowledge is produced which would serve as a reference to future/ potential researchers.

1.6. Scope of the Study

This particular study is limited to Addis Ababa University- Main Campus (*Sidist kilo*). The population of the study is grass roots student-led networks that are currently active in the main campus and the sample is purposively restricted to three student-led networks that have been directly involving in gender related activities/issues in their capacity in their respective campus and beyond.

1.7. Limitation of the Study

The study passed through different limitations ranging from sample selection to COVID-19 pressure. The study targets only student-led networks and the view of campus students and university community, at large, is not included. Apart from this, data was collected by the time COVID protocol was in high alert that physical distance restrictions and face-masking was a must that impeded recording of interviews. Hence, the group informal interview was a little bit affected as participants were not very comfortable with interviews with face masks. However, the researcher used his maximum effort to reduce the aforesaid challenges and made everything possible in order to collect the required data using long stick to record the interview and not to compromise the validity of such high-impact study.

1.8. Organization of the study

The study is organized in five chapters. The first chapter outlines the introduction, problem statement and discusses the objectives and significance of the study. Chapter two deals with literature review, describes the main concepts and theoretical frameworks of the study. The third chapter introduces the methodology used in the study. Chapter Four and Five present findings and discuss the summary, conclusion and recommendation parts respectively.

CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Defining Grassroots Organizing

Grassroots refers to the basic element of an activity or operation. It is a term used to describe collective groups who have a common social concern and aspire to bring change from the bottom-up. Foster (n.d) defined grassroots organizing as a way that individuals, who have a common concern, come together and take action to achieve their objective. It is a type of mobilization in which regular people band together to address a problem in their neighborhood and take action to promote change. Grassroots can have legitimacy as civil society organizations and perform their tasks lawfully.

According to Gernert et al. (2018), civil society is defined as acting autonomously from the state, upon interests and motivations different from winning politicians or gaining economic benefit. The most prominent role of civil society lies in altering values and beliefs towards more sustainable ones, contributing to socio-ecological and economic literacy, and putting knowledge into action for sustainability. Gernert et al. (2018) also asserted that grassroots begin from the simplest forms of neighborhood networks and grow to a registered civil society organization. Grassroots organizing is multi-faceted and ranges from small village cooperatives, development initiatives, and peace building initiatives to college student movements and organizations. This study solely focuses on grassroots organizing on college campus settings whose concerns hinge on social issues. Grassroots are very often embedded in the community they live in and have local roots, they have very often loose organizational structure and their life span exists as long as they maintain strong organizational structures (Gernert et al., 2018, p. 34).

According to Ricee (2020), grassroots movements can be a powerful force for social change if managed properly. These movements address a wide range of issues, including social injustice, environmental issues, human rights violations, poverty, and economic inequality. When executed effectively, they can offer a variety of creative and inspiring approaches for ordinary people to get involved in the change they want to see (Ricee, 2020, p. 1).

2.1.1. Theorizing Student-led Networks

Student-led networks are a form of grassroots organizing that is established, led, and controlled by students. These networks are open to everyone, regardless of race, creed, disability, sexual orientation, or age, as long as they are acting on their campuses. All student organizations must adhere to the rules and procedures set forth in the organization's constitution, and active membership in recognized student organizations is limited to currently enrolled students and staff. Students can create any club, network, or organization to pursue personal and group interests and to challenge social injustices on campus and beyond.

Recognition is the process through which a student organization receives "active" status within the Office of Student Life and the University. It is a privilege given to student organizations that successfully complete the registration process and comply with University guidelines at all times. Every student organization is bound to all rules of the University System .

According to Krause et al. (2017), recognition is the process through which a student organization receives "active" status within the Office of Student Life and the University. In this particular study, students receive their active status from the target university's dean of students. Students can apply for club establishment as long as they meet the stipulated guidelines. They formulate clear missions, visions, and goals that their group wants to achieve.

The process of forming a grass root student-led network varies depending on the context. However, in general, these networks are usually initiated by one individual or a group of like-minded individuals who have collective concerns in their community. They form a network to combat the problem and achieve their goals

2.2. The concept of Civil Society Organization (CSO)

Civil society is a term that has been defined by various scholars in similar ways. According to Shaw (2020), civil society is the ecosystem that influences social change outside of the family, market, or government. It is often referred to as the space where we act for the common good, and aims to connect poor or marginalized people with groups that can mobilize support to help. Similarly, the Ethiopian new CSO law 1113/2019 defines Civil Society Organization (CSO) as a non-governmental, non-partisan entity established by two or more persons on a voluntary basis and registered to carry out any lawful purpose, including non-government organizations,

professional associations, and consortiums. The London School of Economics Center for Civil Society working definition of civil society refers to the arena of non-coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values (as cited in Mihret, Zeleke, 2010). People can establish CSOs for different causes such as reducing poverty, defeating injustices, and organizing support to the helpless or the neediest. Tessema Mebratu (2015) defined civil society as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) which are the associations of people lawfully organized, as independent, voluntary, and non-profit distribution entities that are often formed to pursue various legitimate socio-economic and political purposes. This broad definition includes not only the formal groups that constitute the bulk of civil society but also informal ones through which people link and tie themselves ranging from social movements to various publics that engage in debates in the public sphere. It also emphasizes the activism and advocacy role of civil society (Mihret, Z.:2010:7).

Simona (n.d) stated that people can exercise their democratic rights and be critical of government policies, and challenge negative social norms under the umbrella of civil society entity when they freely exercise their rights. Civil society organizations include faith-based, non-governmental organizations, unions, activists, and grassroots organizations (Shaw, K.:2020). Tessema Mebratu (2015) defined activist groups, advocacy organizations, charities, citizens' militias, civic groups, clubs of different sorts, community foundations, and community organizations as grassroots civil society groups. Examples of civil society organizations are community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based, professional associations, voluntary associations, friendship networks, and non-governmental organizations (Simona, n.d: 7). Therefore, collective grassroots organizations or student-led networks under study are no exceptions to be dubbed as grassroots civil society groups. The students' social movements qualify this definition to be addressed as collective grassroots collective entitlement and will be treated as collective grassroots CSO.

2.3. International Frameworks on Freedom of Association

The African Union charter guarantees freedom of association and freedom of assembly under article 10 and Article 11 respectively. All member countries have committed to incorporating these rights into their national constitutions, policies, and laws to ensure citizens' freedom of association. The charter defines association as "an organized, independent, not-for-profit body,

based on the voluntary grouping of persons with a common interest, activity, or purpose. Such an association may be formal (de jure) or informal (de facto)” 1. As a result, numerous civil society organizations have been founded to address various issues facing society, ranging from poverty reduction to policy advocacy in Africa and Ethiopia in particular.

The Ethiopian National Constitution under Article 31 and the adoption of various international and regional instruments have created a favorable ground for collective grassroots organizations to emerge. However, despite the constitution and the AU charter and other international instruments, the EPRDF had never granted the right to freedom of association for independent collective grassroots unless they were linked to the state in order to promote the government’s political agenda. NGOs were supposed to engage in various task-based development initiatives, not in rights issues and advocacy, which sharply opposes the fundamental intent of the constitution and the grand principles of international conventions 1.

Following the regime change in Ethiopia in 2018, the CSO law was revised to perfectly align with the intent of the national constitution, and many CSOs have been formed afterwards. People started exercising their rights of the right to assembly and freedom of association. The revised proclamation 1113/2019 granted CSOs and collective grassroots the ability to actively engage in advocacy and human rights through a rights-based approach.

The right to freedom of association and freedom of assembly has been restored, which has been a vital improvement and created a favorable ground for people to organize themselves at the grassroots level and engage in various activities with no restrictions as long as they act lawfully. Registration is vital for civil society organizations (CSOs) to function, and engagement of any kind is restricted otherwise. Student-led networks under study are variants of collective grassroots, though they are registered on the host university (AAU).

Simona (n.d.) asserts that movements of any kind are variants of civil society organizations, and social movements come to exist from civil society organizations. Social movements generally emerge out of civil society and often attempt to expand it, and movements are themselves an important component of civil society.

According to Simona (n.d.), social movements of any kind, including the student-led networks under study, qualify to be dubbed as civil society organizations.

2.3.1. The National policy Frameworks on Freedom of Association

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took over after the military rule "Dergue" regime ended in 1991. The new constitution was promulgated in 1994, and it unequivocally endorses gender equality by prohibiting various kinds of discriminatory laws at the national and regional levels. The national women's policy was drafted in 1993, before the constitution, and endorsed women's rights as human rights. The constitution addresses women's comprehensive human and democratic rights issues. The Ministry of Women's Children and Youth Affairs (MOWCY) was established, and gender machineries came to exist. The national action plan for gender equality was framed to better realize gender equality in all federal sector offices and regional bureaus.

The Ethiopian constitution grants democratic rights such as freedom of association and freedom of assembly. Article 30 grants the right to assembly, Article 31 grants the right to freedom of association for any cause or purpose, and Article 35 addresses women's rights. The constitution prohibits discriminatory laws at the national and regional levels. The National Women's Policy was drafted in 1993 and endorsed women's rights as human rights. The Ministry of Women's Children and Youth Affairs (MOWCY) was established, and gender machineries came to exist. Sector-wide policies and structural arrangements have been developed to ensure women's progress in society. Initiatives within the education sector include the establishment of the Gender Directorate of the Ministry of Education, the National Girls' Education Advisory Committee, the National Higher Education Institutions' Gender Forum, and Gender Offices set up at various institutions of higher learning. The Ethiopian Ministry of Education formulated a Code of Conduct on the Prevention of School Related Gender Based Violence in schools, in 2014, which prevents any forms of violence and harassment in and around school settings. Ethiopia has committed to standards for gender equality and women's human rights as a natural outcome of its own constitution and its national women's policy (1993), which guarantee women's equality and the protection of women's human rights in various spheres of life.

2.4. The practice of Ethiopian Women's Grassroots Movement

Numerous kinds of grass root associations have been formed ever since the imperial regime in Ethiopia. As Burgess (2013) asserted that the early twentieth century (1935) witnessed the emergence of the first ever women's welfare association formed by the upper echelon groups

under the support of Empress Taitu in order to raise funds to support urban women. In addition to this, the Armed forces' wives association and The Ethiopian Young women's Christian associations were formed contemporaneously so as to support widows and children of soldiers who died in the war and to serve the best interest of women in a particular society respectively, however, the civil unrest, coordinated by students, overthrew the imperial regime and the new military junta 'Dergue' regime came to power and disbanded those associations and their properties were nationalized (Burgess, G.;2013). State-linked women's association like REWA (Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association) replaced the previous ones. The trend of forming state-linked women's association continued as changeover of regimes continued even by EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front). Independent grass root associations were discouraged despite the constitutional rights. The only independent grass root advocacy association, founded by lawyer women, was EWLA (Ethiopian women's lawyer association) with a primary objective to defend women's rights, to raise awareness, and to lobby reforms on gender equality. However, the then ruling party, EPRDF, dismantled it for fear of political affiliation and "for their first ever shadow report on government compliance with CEDAW which also provided information to the UN monitoring committee (Burgess, G.:2013).

Women, in Ethiopia, have not only been involved in organizations and different forms of peaceful activism, but also in active military organization, like the case in Tigray. This was evidenced by The Tigray People's Liberation Front women members who transgressed the deeply entrenched gender related social norms and participated in the battle and played a huge role for the fall down of the 'Dergue' regime (Burgess, G.:2013).

Women use their democratic rights to organize themselves in associations for a common cause and interest. Here are some examples of collective women's associations. These are: Women's health association, women lawyers' association, women education association, women association of the disabled, the Ethiopian midwives association and the national association for the handicapped women, are some examples of the encouraging growth of civil society whose concern lies in addressing the specific needs of women in their communities by assisting them to develop their leadership skills and participate in the democratization process" (UN Watchwomen, National Action Plan,2003: 5). The section below states the national policy that inspired people to form associations or networks for a cause though. There is striking similarity

that both traditional social networks and contemporary associations were mainly dominated by women as most of the aforementioned associations were founded and led by women. There are different women-led associations in Ethiopia. However, existing literatures confirm the lack of strong and exemplary women's grassroots associations.

2.5. Global Students' Movements

The history of students' movements goes back as far as the birth of universities despite agendas varies a great deal as time goes by.

History tells us that university campuses are hotbeds for conceiving students' movements on a variety of social issues. A social movement is a collective, organized, sustained, and non-institutional challenge to authorities, power holders, or cultural beliefs and practices. It is a good way to comprehend human diversity, a central source of social change through which new ways of seeing society and directing it can be developed and also a main source of political conflict and change. Lerch, C. J(1973) Student movements have existed for years and are dynamic forces which challenge the social and political structures of many nations. Porta and Diani(2006) stated that one of the main reasons students mobilize is represented by a function of discontent in a society. There are a number of factors to look for explaining why a movement emerges and where it does, drawn from all these perspectives: political factors such as division among elites, lessened repression from the police and army, economic conditions such as increased discretionary income, demographic conditions such as the increased population density, cultural factors such as moral intuitions or sensibilities. In many cases potential protestors must frame and understand many of these factors as opportunities before they can take advantage of them (p.137).”

Porta, D., Diani, M., (2006) asserted historically, in times of crisis, student activism has been a crucial force for social change. Students around the world have been at the forefront of movements to promote democracy and human rights. Student movements have toppled powerful dictatorships and military juntas. Student movements have ended wars. And student activism has often served as the conscience (p.137).”

For nations, reminding people in times of turmoil of the founding ideals of their countries and the aspirations of all people for justice, dignity, and equality. Thus, it comes as no surprise that

the world's most repressive government's jail and often murder student activists, close down college campuses during times of crisis, and enforce strict guidelines about what can and cannot be taught in school systems. Those in power understand the significance of student movements — often more so than student activists themselves

Simona, T (n.d) Student movements often focused on making changes in schools, such as increasing student influence over curriculum or improving educational funding. In some settings, student groups have had a major role in broader political events. Simona, T (n.d) once initial activists in a social movement form groups and begin to think of themselves as a movement, their next step is usually to try to expand their movement by recruiting others to their cause. Much of student's success "lies in their ability to manipulate or provoke large-scale social or economic forces... when students band together they can generate and wield significant economic or political power".

2.5.1. Ethiopian Students movement

In order to understand the current students' movements, it is worth looking at some of the previous movements organized by university students in Ethiopia. Tessema (2015) "Student activists have historically taken crucial initiatives in the struggle against social and political dominations, subjugations, and inequalities and it started in the 1960s"(p. 43). Adamu and Balsvik(2018) "Although the undemocratic rule of Haile Selassie government system was the main reason for its conception, Ethiopian student activism abroad in which Legese (1979) mentioned "ESUNA- Ethiopian students union in North America", the global student movements, the anti-imperialist and pro-socialist movements in the western world, scholarship beneficiary students from various African countries were all contributory factors for the instigation of student activism in Ethiopia, in Addis Ababa University in particular"(266).

According to Hussien Ahmed(2006) the first student movement was not politically driven, instead it was the event of the fashion show by American Peace Corps members in order to promote western cultures, it was anti-American protest in 1968 (p.7). This tells us that the first students' movements were culturally informed, not politically oriented. Student unions were formed, and network linkage was created with ESUNA (Ethiopian students union in North America). And afterwards, students became more critical to the university administration, and started to challenge the university and the Imperial regime at large- a shift from cultural protest

to political informed protest. They moved to the streets of Addis Ababa with a slogan “land to the Tillers” which was intended to shackle the Imperial regime of Haileselassie (Legesse, L:1979). That protest demanded a huge social and political change in the country though an attempt was made by the imperial guards to repress the movement, later ended with regime change.

Hussien, Ahmed (2006) “The second decade (1960-1970), which was characterized by the rise of student political activism and social critique, witnessed the coming and failure of the *coup*; the decolonization of Africa (there were African students on government scholarships, and the rise of global student radicalism (for example, in Paris in 1968)” (p.7). This was the time that global students’ radicalism reached to its pick globally, and the fight against colonialism was heightened, and the case of Ethiopian students was not an exception though instigated by initially a pretext western culture protest, it was motivated by internal political discontent of the Imperial regime. As scholars asserted Ethiopian students took a big lesson from other African scholarship beneficiaries to Addis Ababa University (Legesse, L.:1979).

The End of the Imperial regime marked a huge reform of land. Hussein, Ahmed (2006)” The land reform proclamation was implemented primarily through the efforts of the students and teachers of AAU, and those of senior secondary schools, often at great cost to their lives” (p.16). However, students were not happy about the military rule, and again, went out into the streets demanding the military junta to give power to democratically elected people’s government which was impossible to do and students’ protests were suppressed. Leaders were arrested, a national campaign was declared by the military government. The government publicly announced the imminent implementation of the Development through Cooperation Campaign (*zamaḥā*), ostensibly designed to enable students to teach and politicize the peasants” (Hussien, A, 2006:16).

With the demise of ‘Degue’ regime in 1991, and the declaration of political pluralism by EPRDF, fresh and new forms of student activism and movements erupted the country. Hussein (2006) “the 1991 marked and proved even more turbulent than the earlier ones since it saw some revival of activism inspired by the trend towards political pluralism and economic liberalism” (p.17). all students’ protests were militarily suppressed and leaders suspended from the

university and universities were described by the ruling party as “ a fortress of elitist arrogance” (Hussein, Ahmed, 2006: 21).

Previous students’ movements were gender neutral as students’ primary goals were demanding social and political changes. Throughout the process, there were so many active female students’ involvements during the mass students’ movements. Tigist (2017) asserted “despite a significant number of female student activists’ participation in students’ movements and contribution to the downfall of the imperial regime, their history remained to be invisible or unrecorded”(p. 6). It is a foundation for contemporary students’ activism, mobilization strategies, and tactics were essential though proper documentation lacks. The trend of student activism continues as generation succeeds despite the variation of causes.

2.6. Conceptualizing Gender Equality

Different sources define gender slightly in a different way to the context they work. The working definition of gender varies from organization to organization. For example, World Health Organization (WHO) defines gender “Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed.” This definition signifies the fact that the characteristics women, men, girls and boys develop is influenced by the socially ascribed roles and responsibilities to all of them, and everyone is expected to perform according to the assigned roles. And challenging these ascribed roles would be considered as insane or deviating from the norm.

With Striking similarities, UNICEF (2017) defined gender equality as “The concept that women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity”. Gender equality is all about valuing the differences and similarities between women and men irrespective of their sexual differences. Yulia and Liz(2018) asserted that good girls are those who never report sexual assaults, and those who never challenge the hegemony of men “Women who appear to abide by these roles represent the “good girls” who are less likely to experience or report on their being sexually harassed or assaulted”. It says a lot about how women and girls should act in a society to be named as good girls. Hence, challenging the ascribed roles is insane. Benevolent sexism plays a huge role for perpetuating gender inequalities in every sphere. Yulia and Liz (2018) put their points

“benevolent sexism makes women doubt themselves and their cognitive capabilities, resulting in diminished performance in education and work.” Equally importantly, benevolent sexism discourages women to do the right thing to defend themselves but seemingly sympathetic comments, words and suggestions from fellow women stifles other women not to exploit their human potential. A good example of gender stereotyping is that women are weak by their very nature and can’t reach to the top ladder. Women should act like a woman, and behave like a man. This reinforces the pre-existing gender inequalities.

Pekular(2019) briefly discussed that there are five ways to fight gender inequality are:

Give girls access to education, give women platforms to be in power and achieve economic success, end violence and sexual assault against women, assure girls and women have access to menstrual health facilities, and end child marriage.

Hence, fighting one or more of the above points can create a pathway to gender equality. Gender equality cannot be achieved over night, and needs a concerted effort from various stakeholders combined with policy amendments that best aligns with the Beijing plat form for action that obliges signatory countries to mainstream gender perspective in every sectors and encourage CSO grassroots to work on gender equality efforts. Campus based clubs combat sexual violence in their respective campuses.

2.6.1. Strategies to address gender Issues

There are different strategies/approaches to boldly fight gender inequalities by different groups such as college student-led networks on their respective campuses. There are various gender issues to confront like sexual assault and harassment on campus level and beyond. Students in their collective actions can be a voice to the voiceless, and amplify the problem through different mechanisms such as activism and empowerment. Activism is about to amplify the problem and bring the issue to attention; whereas empowerment refers to empowering the victims or the disempowered (victim recipients) so that they can defend themselves or claim their rights. These two important approaches are discussed below.

2.6.1.1. Activism

Activism is quite simply taking action to effect social change; this can be led by individuals or collectively in social movements. Many people can be classified as activists and many actions

can be interpreted as activism, but this doesn't mean that all activism is carried out by activists. The term activist is contentious, as what constitutes an activist and what actions can be defined as activism are often contested. It sounds good to look at the activities that people do rather than how individuals define themselves as an activist (“Permanent Culture Now”,2021).

The term ‘activism’ seems to be vague for so many readers, and what students’ activities are regarded as activism is also another crucial issue. The literal meaning of ‘activism’ is being active, not passive. Being active is meant say that students participate in issues that matter the society they live in. Cole (2013) asserted student activism as “involvement in and commitment to social change or social justice (p.5).” And for encompasses overt and covert forms of political action and opposition...from most visible forms of public protest and community organizing to less visible but equally engaged forms such as, writing, education for consciousness raising, performance art, and so on”(as cited in Tigist Abye, 2016: 20).

As asserted by different scholars, college students’ activism has emerged as long as the beginning of college itself. Hence, student activism, on campus, is politically oriented and can employ various strategies to pursue their goals and draw public attention. It can happen at any level and any time when students feel something is going wrong either in their own campus setting or beyond (Cole, B.:2013).

The big question to ponder here is ‘How do students struggle for social change through activism?’ This is a critical question. Student-led activism is a common phenomenon in different higher education contexts. Cole (2013) asserted student activism as “involvement in and commitment to social change or social justice”. Broad involvement in social and political issues to bring about change is considered as activism. Everyone can be an activist as long as they amplify social injustices of any form/kind. Scholars have underscored the importance of activism in order to effect sound change in the social and political sphere in which without activists who mobilize and organize students, change may not happen as Tessema (2015) stated “students’ collective engagement and contentious actions cannot be done without activists.” And again, Webb (2017) emphasizes activism as a vital tool to oppose and resist social norms that annihilate our private daily lives. Hence, gendered norms can be resisted through individual or group activism as it is a tool to struggle social norms- gendered social norms that even impede the

private lives of each of us. In this regard, student-led networks can be potent force to crack gendered social norms if they use appropriate strategies to do so.

2.6.1.2. Women Empowerment

Women's empowerment can be defined to promoting women's sense of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices, and their right to influence social change for themselves and others. Empowerment is carried out because there are disempowered people who always face gender-based challenges and worst of all, they may not have the knowhow on challenging it.

Van Eerdewijk et al (2017) define empowerment as “the expansion of choice and strengthening of voice through the transformation of power relations” thus; women and girls have more control over their lives. Empowerment is a process of continuing change through which women and girls magnify their ambitions, reinforce their voice, and exercise more choice. Women empowerment is also put at the center of attention in The United Nations Millennium development goal 5. Empowered women can control their lives, reduce subordination and dependency, and more importantly, they can take the onus to fight for their own rights per se. Empowerment is all about making individual and collective choices, and ability to make decisions that affect own life and the lives of others.

Women’s movements or feminist movements are all initiated by social injustice and inequality directed at women due to patriarchal norms and laws. Women and feminists have tremendous questions with regard to rights and opportunities. They demand their rights to vote, access to and control over resources, equal opportunity in the social market, and their reproductive right to be considered. The more a woman gets empowered, the better she claims her rights in all spheres.

Van Eerdewijk et al (2017) asserted voice, choice and resource are key elements of empowerment. Women and girls get empowered by exercising their voice gets heard, their choices respected and their right to control over resource is fully respected. Owing this in mind, empowerment brings the power relation dynamics into the level to shared power relations. And others interpret it the other way. Empowerment is a process through which women exercise power over men in every aspect which is quite different from the intent of feminist-grounded definition of empowerment.

Van Eerdewijk and colleagues, in collaboration with Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, 2017, put the most nuanced but key terms in relation to empowerment as follows:

Empowerment- The expansion of choice and the strengthening of voice through the transformation of power relations, so women and girls have more control over their lives and futures.

Choice- The ability of women and girls to make and influence choices that affect their lives and futures

Voice-The capacity of women and girls to speak up and be heard and to shape and share in discussions and decisions—in public and private domains—that affect their lives and futures.

Power can enable and make action and agency happen. It also operates in visible, invisible and hidden expressions. The word ‘power’ can be attached with different prepositions which meanings are changed based on what preposition comes with ‘power. For example, power to, power over, power within, and power-with.

These are the most important terms that are integrally tied with empowerment and empowerment plays a pivotal role to secure agency both individually and in group. Meticulously executed empowerment can liberate women and girls from getting oppressed. Through empowerment, women can occupy better leadership positions and improve their decision making practices both at home and in public spheres. A lot has been said about empowerment and various organizations have different approaches to empowerment. Marcus and Brodbeck (2015) stated the practice of school-based girls clubs an increasingly well-known methodology to encouraging girls’ empowerment in Ethiopia and are being broadly used by the government and NGOs. Hence, school-based club is popular approach in which girls learn new skills, self-confidence and assertiveness in their school compound with their peers. The more women get empowered the better they claim their rights and be independent from oppression and subordination.

2.7. Theoretical Perspectives on Collective action

2.7.1 Social Identity Model of collective action (SIMCA)

Social identity model is developed by using two seemingly different theories- social identity and collective action theory to produce a complete model that treats social identification and

collective action for a social change by grass root actors. The SIMCA model is coined by Zomeren et al (2008) in order to address the psychological and sociological issues to address in building social identities and taking collective action afterwards in a certain social context where there is group-based anger for a certain social issue.

Keshavarzi and Mc Garty (2021) People who identify with a group are more likely to devote their resources to help realize a shared (group) goal. SIMCA uses the four frameworks to shape grass root collective action. These include:

The first framework is ‘Social identification’ (one’s sense of oneself as a member of a group). It comprises four sub-elements: these are, emotional significance (asserts interest in membership to the group), commitment (refers to one’s commitment to achieve shared goals), shared sense of ‘we’ (common elements shared by the group members), and involvement (denotes the actual participation in the group).

Research in social psychology and sociology has established that identification with a social group is an important precondition for engaging in collective behaviors (Becker, et al, 2011: 3). Research shows that identification with a social group uniquely predicts participation in collective action. That is, participation in collective action can lead to increased politicized identification among participants, turning them into activists (Becker, et al, 2011: 3).

The second framework in Zomeren et al’s (2008) SIMCA model is perceived injustices or grievances. The concept of perceived injustice, particularly in its affective form, refers to the feeling of anger caused by a sense of grievance. Feelings of deprivation come from the comparisons that members of groups make with the situation of other groups. A negative result of such an assessment results in perceived injustice that, in turn, fuels collective action participation to overcome the subjectively unacceptable situation (Keshavarzi, and McGarty, 2021). In addition, Tausch & Becker (2012) affirmed that developing the feeling of anger is the most relevant emotion to get motivated to embark to restore justice.

The third element in Zomeren and colleagues SIMCA is group efficacy. Group efficacy (a perception that the group has the capacity to change the status quo), refers to the sense that actors believe that their actions can make a difference. At the group level, people will take part in collective activities as they come to believe that their group’s efforts can result in success

(Bandura, 2000). In doing so, students believe that gender inequalities and unequal power relations that cause sexual harassment can be dismantled, at least reduced, when they act collectively. We feeling “we can” is vitally important to embark on the issue.

In reference to group efficacy, Saab et al. (2016) asserted that group-efficacy refers to the perceived likelihood that collective action will achieve a desired social change.

The fourth framework underscores the importance of moral conviction (perceptions of the moral importance of the issue). Moral convictions predict collective action to achieve social change. Because moral convictions – defined as strong and absolute stances on moral issues – tolerate no exceptions, any violation motivates individuals to actively change that situation (Zomeren et al. 2011).

As social identity and collective action theorists, core psychological motivations that promote collective action are perceived disadvantage/injustice and moral conviction. We can see both theories separately how they are related to the matter under study.

2.7.2. Collective Action Theory

“Collective action refers to actions taken together by a group of people whose goal is to enhance condition and achieve a common objective” (Dictionary of Britannica). Collective action is inseparably shaped by and shaping gender in society. For different reasons people create collective grassroots. Some groups come together to demand new recognitions, policy changes, or access to resources to meet even the most basic of needs. Through collective action, the problem of sexism can best be addressed”(Radke et al: 2016: 865). Students’ Collective action is to challenge social injustices and gender norms on campus and beyond.. Collective action refers to any action that individuals undertake as group members to pursue group goals such as social change (Zomeren, et al: 2018). Social change includes changing gender norms. With regard to social changes Marcus and Brodbeck (2015) stated that “Norm change can also be driven by individuals and organized groups”. There are varieties of drivers for social that emanate from either individuals or groups when they feel that a certain gender norm is problematic and determine to change. Student-led networks can challenge any gender norms or gender relations in their own settings or beyond as change of any kind can be instigated by individuals or collectives. Collective action theory reaffirms the fact that collective action would

be an action that a certain social group aspires to change as part of their struggle in achieving collective common goals. Actors like student-led networks amplify social injustices and existing gender norms bottom up through their activism. Marcus and Brodbeck (2015) asserted “activism of this kind generally leads to change from the bottom up, starting with individual families and communities. But it can also lead to transformation from the top down, through legal, policy and programme reform. It is often the combined effects of several drivers working together simultaneously that lead to change.

Collective action involves women discussing their lives, analyzing their shared experiences of injustice and oppression, and developing common goals. Basically, it is about understanding and challenging gender-specific constraints on women's options, which prevent them from achieving their true potential. And collective action is vital in challenging male oppression. In gender and development literature on women's (Kabeer: 2003, as cited in Sweetman, 2013: p.218). Keshavarzi (2021) asserted “collective actions can take both the conventional (normative) and the confrontational (non-normative) versions” and collective action often aims at challenging injustice.

In order to analyze the roles of collective actors and social identity groups, Zomeren et al (2008) formulated/ coined a model called SIMCA (social identity model of collective action). This model combines social identity and collective action. The proponents of SIMCA go beyond social identity in order to describe the efforts/actions of the group. The group should act together in order to achieve their stipulated goals so that collective action theory is merged with social identity by Zomeren et al (2008) so as to create a link between identity formation and collective action of tasks that lead them to realize goals.

Women and girls engage in collective action when they stand together in solidarity and exercise voice to transform institutions and power relations. Collective action is a powerful tool for social transformation and is fundamental to women and girls' empowerment on a societal level

Collective identity refers to a person's sense of belonging to a group. The identity of the group, or the 'collective,' becomes a part of the person's individual identity. The idea here is that by participating in social activities, a person can develop a sense of belonging and an identity that goes beyond the person (Study.com).

According to Tajfel and Turner (1979) collective action includes all actions aimed at improving certain conditions, the status, the power or the influence of a group. In order to change the condition of the group, one must take concepts as social identity, perceived injustice, emotions and perceived efficacy into account (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2007) as Tel, G- MA Thesis cited). Hence, student-led networks are studied using these theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

2.8. Empirical Evidences

Previous researches generated some empirical evidences on social movements, student networks' roles in dealing with gender issues, and inequalities. Student engagements in higher education institutions tended to vary in terms of organizations, agendas they advance, identity gender representation and agency, etc.

2.8.1. Experiences related to campus-based student initiatives

Several studies (e.g., Krause, et al., (2017); Bloom, et al., (2022); Bovill and Podpadec (2022); Cantor et al., (2015); Hirsch & Khan, (2020) indicate that campus students have potential in battling campus-based violence. Before shifting our attention to gender, sexual violence and sexual harassment initiatives, it is important to recognize the legacy of global students' activism movements. Proteasa & Andreescu (2019) assessed contributions by students' collective movements on special issues "Students, their protests, and their organizations: exploring old gaps and new evidence" worldwide, and explored evidences from influential literature on students' protests and their organizations. The authors observed students collective movements mobilize protests "against the 'powers that be' – whether their own universities (for example, the divestment movement in the US or the campaigns against tuition fee hikes) (Altbach, 1997; Cini, 2019), their 'neoliberal' governments (e.g., protests against higher education policies across Europe or the Global Justice Movement (Della Porta, 2015), or their authoritarian ones (such as the Greek students' rebellion against dictatorship in the 1960s (Kornetis 2013) or the 1980s struggles in South Korea (Lee 1997)", as summarized by Proteasa & Andreescu (2019:4).

Vaillant and Schwartz (2019) documented anti-neoliberal student revolt in Argentina as part of the global justice movement category. For his part, Cini (2019) seeks to explain the success of the 2015 student mobilizations (#FeesMustFall) in blocking a tuition fee increase in South Africa. Overall, current collective action in African universities generally targeted women's right

violence such as femicides, rapes, gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, and high rates of HIV/AIDS among women (Leburu & Phetlho-Thekiso, 2015; Ndlovu et al., 2020).

Ndlovu, et al. (2020) explored situation of Femicide in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa. This study assumed that higher education institution traditionally provided a safe environment for women's advancement and empowerment; however the current series of violence set to undermine and reset the efforts of women empowerment for better resilience. Based on qualitative data analysis, the study findings showed that majority of the killings were believed to be perpetrated by men. In practice, Ndlovu, et al. (2020) did not find evidence to support their assumption. Yet, the researchers identified factors underlying femicide include cultural norms; women's position in the society and natural vulnerabilities, substance abuse, unfaithfulness and women commodification. Finally, they suggested the need to implement comprehensive strategy for improved security on campus including emergency response plans as well as introduction of harsher penalties for the offenders. However, the research has focused on institutional responses and administration failure but the role of social movements in building safe environment for women's advancement and empowerment is not explored.

The adverse effect of cultural norms on the education of girls is widely studied in developing counters. For example, an ethnographic study by Pincock's (2017) discusses the impact of repressive norms on the education of girls in Tanzania. The author states that, "...considerations of what empowerment looks like in relation to one's sexuality are particularly important in relation to schooling for teenage girls as a route to expanding their agency" (p. 909).

On recent social movements, Nardini, et al (2020) found activist movements, such as Black Lives Matter, surge when support grows for their social justice goals. At their core, social movements advance when people act collectively by rising in solidarity with a shared purpose to address injustice and inequality. (p.1). The study concluded social movements succeed when individuals and groups at the grassroots level are cultivated, nurtured, and connected—both to the movement's cause and through relationships between the movement's members. In effect, successful social movements create and construct an interconnected grassroots community which embraces decentralized, local action while channeling the movement toward a shared purpose and goal (Nardini, et al: 2020: 2). The study is of particular relevance to this research to examine

whether the studied student-led networks have shared purpose and goal and explore how their causes are communicated to members and the target community.

According to Krause, et al(2017), students act as agents of change, advocating against campus sexual assault and transforming campus norms about consent, prevention, support for survivors, and institutional response” (p.211). Student-led initiatives, such End Rape on Campus, and Survivors Eradicating Rape Culture, exemplify existing student efforts to redress sexual assault and to empower peers to change norms around consent, sex, and relationships, as well as to hold institutions accountable for inadequate responses to incidents of sexual assault”(p.212).

Krause, et al(2017) stated “student-led movements affect the campus climate with respect to sexual assault could facilitate cross-campus comparisons and advance the nation toward sustainable declines in campus sexual assault by promoting student initiatives” (p.220). Most political and social changes originated in colleges. Nardini, et al (2020) stated different renowned global movements were first instigated by college students and spilled over into the society. These include: #Black Live s Matter, #March for Our Lives, #Me Too, #Climate Strikes, #Standing Rock, #The Women’s March, Marriage Equality.

Bloom et al., (2020) studied campus’s leadership to make decisions, functions and student-centered action of diverse students, among other variables. The study observed highly impactful solutions initiated by and for students at least in three focus areas: Student Knowledge and awareness, expanding and tailoring existing sexual violence and sexual harassment (SVSH) services, and changing the structure of SVSH. The study did not reveal the impact of the initiative, however, it appreciated the changes towards addressing students’ concerns to share their lived experiences, educate those who hold positions of power, and continue to empower them to voice their concerns, demand change, and push our universities into making changes to SVSH prevention, education, and programming.

Previous studies suggest that people in a movement’s network often reflect a diverse community, spanning differences in age, ethnic background, and social status. Chaney et al (2019) theorized that groups that have been similarly marginalized may feel a sense of solidarity and therefore are more likely to join effort to create change (as cited in Nardini, et al:2020). These attributes are explored in this study.

2.8.2. Feminist Movements

The role and impact of feminist movements in Ethiopia is barely known. A national survey by Enyew and Mihret (2018) titled “Liberal feminism: Assessing its compatibility and applicability in Ethiopia context” attempted to analyze the constraints and prospects of applying feminist approaches in Ethiopia. Due to constraining government ideologies and deep rooted and inflexible beliefs in society, they concluded as follows:

The strategies, such as education and training designed by liberal feminists could not bring instantaneous and long lasting change which is largely criticized by radical and other feminists. In Ethiopia, there have been deep rooted and inflexible beliefs and traditions that demand a huge assignment to challenge gender inequality. In these situations, it is challenging to apply liberal feminist thoughts as a preeminent strategy in Ethiopia. It also takes much time to alter the existing social norms, values, traditions, beliefs and customs connected to Ethiopian culture. Therefore, the government of Ethiopia shall strive to adopt other feminist approaches combined with liberal feminist strategies to come up with a high-speed and remarkable change in attitudes and perceptions so that gender equality can be attained (ibid, p. 64).

Unfortunately, no other research related to feminist movements in Ethiopia can be found. But there is growing body of literature across the world (Walby, 2002). Lerner (2001) summarizes the involvement demanding equality in gender, class, race, and ethnicity, saying: “Since the 1970s under the impact of postmodernism, deconstruction, feminist scholarship, and challenges to it by women of color, fundamental categories of knowledge and systems of explanation have been disputed, problematized and, in some cases overthrown.”

Members of the baby-boom young feminists play a crucial role in combating the already entrenched patriarchal norm that puts women in the continued oppression and subordination. As FRIDA and AWID (n.d) asserted “throughout history, young feminist activists have been a crucial part of feminist and social justice struggles at the local, regional and global levels. Young women, girls and trans* youth activists are part of diverse groups, movements, organizations, coalitions and networks, and play a vital role in the strengthening, rejuvenation and sustainability of feminist activism.”

Most of the women who contributed to the emergence of the women’s movements in the United States, and probably in other countries as well, were socially embedded in dense networks, mainly on the radical left (Freeman, 1973) Studies have also confirmed the argument that long-term changes in the organization, resources, and opportunities of groups give rise to movement formation (Jenkins, G. 1983: 531).

2.9. Conceptual and Analytical Frameworks

The study is conducted using social identity model of collective action as theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and feminist theory as analytical framework in order to better analyze student-led networks on campus and their collective identities, and roles in dealing with gender issues collectively with shared goals.

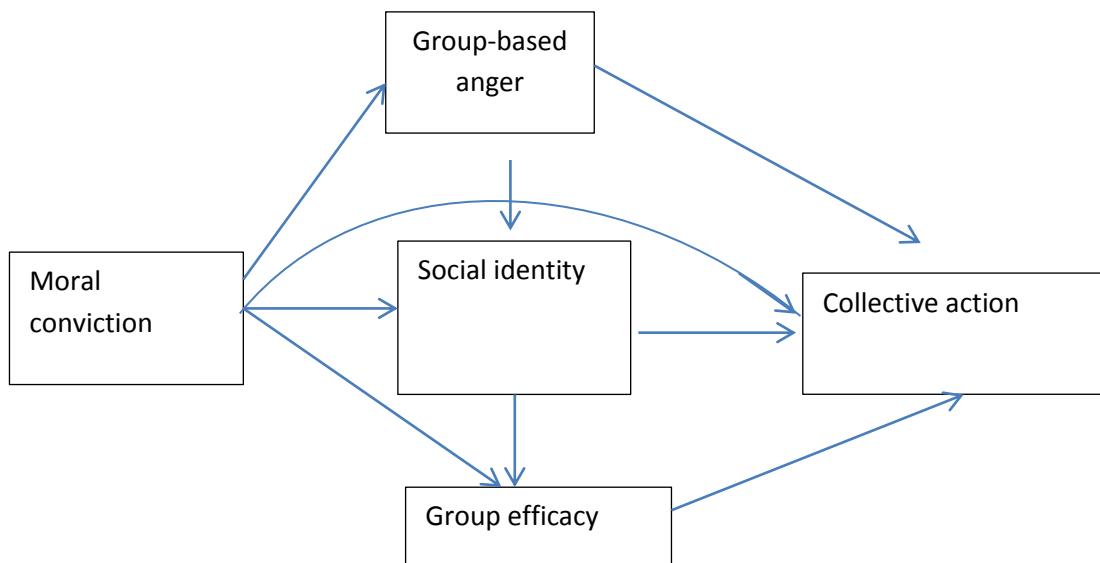


Figure-1. Source: Adapted from Van Zomeren et al (2008)

This conceptual framework abstracts the idea that solidarity and emotional attachments are vitally important to create group/collective identity and it, again, influences the perception of injustice in order to take collective action until justice is served. Emotional attachment serves as a foundation to come to a group mentality and with this group mentality, a common social identity is developed and finally, collective action is taken to combat the perceived injustices by believing in group efficacy and effect social change. Group efficacy refers to “the perceived likelihood that collective action will achieve a desired social change” as Saab et al (2016) stated.

CHAPTER THREE

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

Research design is a plan of study that includes three important elements: philosophical assumptions, strategies of inquiry and specific research methods. This research uses qualitative inquiry using a combination of social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) and feminist assumptions and perspectives. Feminist perspectives are used to analyze and interpret the complex ways in which the social reality of gender inequality is constructed, enforced, and manifested from the largest institutional settings to the details of people's daily lives. A guiding principle is that women's lives are important and their knowledge, experience and judgments should be placed at the center of our research methods. Feminist research is an interpretive endeavor, and that methods used to obtain and preserve the words of women are the best approaches to testing and generating theories about the lives of women. Adding to this, feminists use a multiplicity of research methods and is guided by feminist theory. In light of above assumptions, it was found that qualitative case study approach suits well to explore the experiences and practices of grass root student-led networks' practices in dealing with gender issues in their own contexts. The case study comprises three student networks in which the researcher collected detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures.

3.1.1. Study Area

The study is conducted in Addis Ababa University- main campus. Addis Ababa University is the oldest and most renowned university that pioneered modern college system in the Country. It is in this university that most student activism started in since 1950s. This university is purposively selected because it is the first and largest public University in Ethiopia, where students from all corners of the country are admitted. Situated at African capital, being the nation's modernization epicenter, and a seat for many international organizations, undergraduate students in the University are assumed to expose themselves to self-organizing networks, women's rights initiatives and cultural shift against various inequalities.

The trends in the study area show that students organize themselves in order to bring about various social changes by challenging the existing societal and institutional constraints.

3.1.2. Sampling strategy

In light of the existence of so many different kinds of organizations, with varying missions, focus areas, and organizational features, the researcher chose to limit the study to three types of student-led networks based on their age (more than 5 years old), focus areas, and membership composition.

The researcher employed purposive sampling to select three student-led networks who have been vibrant forces in their respective campuses to achieve their causes, and those SLNs who fit well in with the objective of the research were purposively selected. These are, Female Students' Association (FSA), Yellow Movement (YM), and Male's Solidarity Club (MSC) for Gender Equality and Elimination of GBV/'*Yewendoch Agarnet Kibeb*'. The three aforementioned studied networks work in common on gender, women's rights, empowerment and/or community service at Addis Ababa University.

3.1.3. Study Participants

The study involved 16 participants who were selected from the three grassroots student-led networks, AAU gender office, AAU students' dean office, and AAU students' union bureau. The majority of grass root student-led networks' leaders or presidents were graduating class and so were management members. For example, 3 out of 4 management members of Male Solidarity Club were graduating classes, and so were participants from Female Students' Association as all the 4 interviewed were graduating classes. All departments are reportedly represented by formal student-led networks except Yellow Movement which exclusively involves students from College of Law and Governance Studies. In addition to leaders and vice leaders of each student-led network, 2 members from each SLN participated. SLN presidents and vice presidents participated for the in-depth interview while Key informants were purposely selected from Gender Office (directress and Vice directress), Student Dean Office (student club establishment officer) and Students' Union (president) of Addis Ababa University (AAU) due to their relations to the studied networks. The interviews focused on institutional aspects, particularly how gender interventions, and protection of students from gender-based violence are governed and coordinated in the university. Later on, to further understand about the state of feminist movements and liberal gender equality approaches in Ethiopian context, supplementary information was gathered from experienced experts and practitioners in gender works.

3.2. Data Collection

3.2.1. In-depth interview

As one of the methods of qualitative data collection, a series of in-depth interviews (IIs) were employed to student-led network chairpersons and vice chairpersons. Each network leader and vice leaders, a total of 6 participants from three SLNs, were involved for in-depth interviews. Accordingly, they provided detailed information, including establishment, organizational characteristics, and interventions. In line with priorities of their engagement, in-depth interviewees were asked about conceptualization of the problem, responses and strategies in collective actions, discourses and interventions- which are assumed to be central to effectively addressing gender inequality and gender-based violence.

3.2.2. Key Informant Interview

Key informant interviews (KIIs) involved people who have enough information and knowledge about the students' networks- apparently representing gender office, from students' dean office and from students' union, and a total of four participants involved in this interview. The interviews are unstructured so that a free flow of ideas was entertained.

Key informants were purposely selected and interviews focused on institutional aspects of gender interventions, institutional responses and collaboration with student-led activities. The study gathered information related administrative issues from student dean (an entry that registers and oversees, supports students' organizations in the University).

3.2.3. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

According to Smithson (2007), focus groups have been widely used in recent feminist research. Smithson (2017) added that the advantage of using focus groups lies in the fact that they permit researchers to observe a large amount of interaction on a specific topic in a short time. Initially, four focus group discussions were planned, but due to COVID-19 pressure, they were swapped by informal group discussions. The focus group discussion participants were identified with the help of SLN leaders. Once the researcher secured contact address of active members in each of three students' networks, it was possible to recruit voluntary participants. The process, however, was not linear, but itinerary and sometimes circular engagement had been called for. They were approached through a combination of different tactics- individually, in group, by telephone- interview, informal discussions- until the desired information gets gathered. The informal group

discussions were conducted from 22 – 26 September 2020 as participants were busy with other business.

3.2.4. Document Review

In this study, a couple of documents accessed online were systematically filtered. Relevant ones meticulously reviewed, then valuable texts, passages, or ideas were extracted. In addition to online materials, internal documents contained by the studied students' clubs', establishment guideline, anti-sexual harassment law and their organizational routines, and correspondences, bylaws, membership registration forms, minutes and other related materials were sought and reviewed.

3.3. Data Analysis Method

Data generated through the aforementioned methods were analyzed qualitatively. The data collected through interview (both in-depth and key informant) were first transcribed in English as it's presented by each informant/interviewee; organized by content and become arranged for analysis. All data and information were manually presented, discussed and reported qualitatively. A variety of feminist theoretical, conceptual and empirical frameworks combined with social identity and collective action theory were brought in place for the analysis and discussion.

3.4. Ethical considerations

The researcher was granted a support letter by Addis Ababa University, Centre for Gender Studies (CGS) to conduct the research. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, length of time each interview takes, tape recordings, and consent was sought. Confidentiality was highly considered to avoid unnecessary inconveniences, doubts and potential harm to participants. Key informant, in-depth interview and focus group discussion (FGD)-informal group interview schedules were arranged ahead of time and were communicated to the participants as mentioned above. An attempt was also made to make participants feel at ease in case they feel tense and uncomfortable during the interview.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, the study's findings are presented, interpreted, and discussed. The data was organized into major themes and corresponding subthemes using theoretical and analytical perspectives drawn from literature. The primary themes include the nature of community-based organizations, such as student-led networks, organizational characteristics (structure, leadership, collective identity, and organizing shared ideas), major roles and practices (activities performed to promote gender equality), and strategies and challenges facing them.

4.1. Context of the study

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the potential of grass root student-led networks in promoting gender equality issues at AAU-Main Campus. Addis Ababa University was chosen for this study because it was the first to introduce the modern college system in the country and has a gender policy in place to support national and global efforts towards gender equality. The university also encourages students to form clubs on campus. In the 1960s, Addis Ababa University was home to various student-led movements that challenged social injustices and brought about political change that toppled the Feudal System. Despite the shift in contemporary agendas, such as gender and women's issues, the tradition of establishing grass root student-led organizations continues on the target college campus. Therefore, the study focuses on the collective efficacy of self-initiated student-led networks in combating gendered social norms, injustices, and gender-based violence on campus and beyond. The study targets three relevant and vibrant student-led networks that are involved in gender issues: Female Students Association (FSA), Male Solidarity Club (MSC), and Yellow Movement (YM), a female-only grass root feminist collective.

4.2. Nature and Characteristics of the Studied Networks

4.2.1. Organizing and membership categorization

This study examines three student-led grassroots organizations that combat gender-based violence against female students and teachers in Addis Ababa University's main campus which ultimately paves the way to achieve gender equality. The two student-led networks, Female

Students Association (FSA) and Male Solidarity Club (MSC), are classified as student organizations due to their legal recognition and specific membership eligibility criteria. The third student-led network, Yellow Movement (YM), is an informal grassroots platform that connects students informed by feminist thoughts for promoting gender equality and women's rights. As an organization, YM has no officially recognized presence on the university and does not have explicitly expressed membership eligibility criteria. Therefore, it belongs to the student movement category. The first two networks, FSA and MSC, were established pursuant to AAU Senate Legislation relevant to their formation period. The recently revised legislation (March 2019) outlines detailed requirements and procedures that all student organizations must adhere to for obtaining recognition. Other student organizations that address social issues such as HIV/AIDS, promote peace, art, and culture, or are organized around students with special needs are also classified as student organizations by the university.

The Yellow Movement (YM) is not recognized by the dean of students, who regulates student clubs. According to AAU's policy framework, activities conducted by YM are not recognized, similar to other unrecognized informal student organizations or movements. The formal organizations are not allowed to discriminate against students based on their ethnicity, religion, social status, language, or other similar discriminatory grounds. Membership within the registered Student Organizations (RSOs) is open to all undergraduate students. The Male Solidarity Club (MSC) is the most inclusive, with both male and female students as well as university staff encouraged to participate in the club's engagement. However, the other two networks, Female Students Association (FSA) and YM, have no male members. Therefore, unlike the other two, MSC incorporates both genders/sexes in its membership, management, and mobilization efforts.

The membership structure of the Yellow Movement (YM) involves a process that includes inviting students to consciousness-raising groups, which establish a bond of small circles of friends. These circles help carve out space for feminist agency in their daily lives, and then grow into a distinct form of grassroots movement. Finally, numerous grassroots networks become members of YM.

The Female Students Association (FSA) does not practice registration, members list, membership ID, or membership fee. However, it welcomes all female students enrolled in the 13

colleges of AAU to take active participation. By definition, the organization excludes male students' participation in membership and management. In short, in this group, leaders and co-founding members, volunteers, and target users have been all-females. Therefore, it can be viewed as a women-only organization.

A key condition related to membership is that, the article of association contains the founding members' profile, including their signature and photos; therefore, from legal perspective, the real members of FSA are the founders and co-founders. From this standard, although the informants from the FSA claim "all female students in 13 colleges of AAU are default members", according to the **article of association**, this conception is incorrect. Instead, all female students can be categorized as targets for the cause. It is worth-noting that, members are clubs, not individual students. In programmatic sense, in the domain of 'all female university students', there are sub-categories such as beneficiaries, volunteers, or a combination of both, or free-riders, bystanders or even cooperators of alleged abuses. The same observation applies to the Male Solidarity Club (MSC), except its membership structure.

The formation of MSC is based on individual student. As of this academic year (2021/22) the organization reported to have more than 600 active members but this data was not gender disaggregated at the time of study. In terms of inclusiveness, however, the Male Solidarity Club (MSC) contrasts to other two networks. Compared to FSA, this study identified a couple of typical differences. First, the MSC offers open opportunity for both sexes to become members. In effect, it can be recalled as male students –led – mixed-group network or male-majority student clubs' network. Second, they recruit new members annually- usually when first year students join.

As summary, according to current arrangement, the Dean of Student Affair is entrusted to charter and give recognition to clubs, associations, networks, unions or other initiatives- all under the term "student organizations. FSA and MSC have similar organizational setups- formal registration and hierarchical structure. In terms of their operation, both are gender clubs. The difference is that, while the FSA is recognized to operate as "University-wide student organization" through the union of girl's gender clubs rather than with direct membership of individual student, whereas the MSC is formed by direct membership of individual student.

Having the above facts in mind, the next sections describe the characteristics of the studied grass root student-led networks, the organizational setups and management practices.

The Female Students Association (FSA) has a key condition related to membership that requires the article of association to contain the founding members' profile, including their signature and photos. Therefore, from a legal perspective, the real members of FSA are the founders and co-founders. Although the informants from FSA claim that "all female students in 13 colleges of AAU are default members," according to the article of association, this conception is incorrect. Instead, all female students can be categorized as targets for the cause. It is worth noting that members are clubs, not individual students. In the programmatic sense, in the domain of "all female university students," there are sub-categories such as beneficiaries, volunteers, or a combination of both, or free-riders, bystanders, or even cooperators of alleged abuses. The same observation applies to the Male Solidarity Club (MSC), except for its membership structure.

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The Female Students Association (FSA) is recognized to operate as a "University-wide student organization" through the union of girl's gender clubs rather than with direct membership of individual students. On the other hand, the Male Solidarity Club (MSC) is formed by direct membership of individual students. Having the above facts in mind, the next sections describe the characteristics of the studied grassroots student-led networks, the organizational setups, and management practices.

4.2.2. Organizational setups

Participants were asked to explain what their organizational setups look like. Information gathered from the variety sources. The organizational nature of student organization (SOs) cannot be separately treated without mirroring to the University's policy framework. Findings of this study clearly outline the organizational setups of registered student organizations in the university and their practices. In contrast, it was found that the Yellow Movement (YM) being informal and not-integrated to the University's policy framework needs a different analytical approach. Some of key facts that characterize the two SOs (FSA & MSC) in common are:

- ✓ Vertically hierarchal organizational structure
- ✓ Recognized to operate as “University-wide student organization” by fulfilling clearly defined preconditions and procedures. The Dean of Students is mandated to register and oversee all student organizations in its constituency.
- ✓ Among legally permitted thematic areas, both student organizations' recognition falls in the domain for the: “*promotion of the welfare of students*” (Article 179.1.6.); then objectives were formulated in line to “promotion of the interests of disadvantaged groups”, particularly that of “female students”. This is key entry point to navigate the different pathways followed in practice.
- ✓ The University's Dean of Student (DS) is mandated to oversee their conduct and operations, reports, renewal of licenses, including their funding sources, the use of funds and other resources.
- ✓ Their articles of associations, internal rules and regulations were first formulated by founders as part of Procedure for Obtaining Recognition. These documents were not revised since establishment, although the current leaders believe it is possible to revise or amend as needed as far as it does not contradict University's Legislation and Guideline.

The study collected information from various sources to understand the organizational setups of student organizations (SOs) in the university and their practices. The organizational nature of SOs cannot be treated separately without considering the University's policy framework. The Yellow Movement (YM), being informal and not integrated into the University's policy framework, requires a different analytical approach. The two SOs (FSA & MSC) share some key characteristics, including a vertically hierarchical organizational structure. They are recognized as “University-wide student organizations” by fulfilling clearly defined preconditions and

procedures. The Dean of Students is responsible for registering and overseeing all student organizations in its constituency. Both student organizations' recognition falls under the domain of "promotion of the welfare of students" and their objectives are formulated in line with "promotion of the interests of disadvantaged groups", particularly that of "female students". This is a key entry point to navigate the different pathways followed in practice. The University's Dean of Student (DS) is mandated to oversee their conduct and operations, reports, renewal of licenses, including their funding sources, the use of funds and other resources. Their articles of associations, internal rules and regulations were first formulated by founders as part of the Procedure for Obtaining Recognition. Although these documents have not been revised since establishment, the current leaders believe it is possible to revise or amend them as needed as long as it does not contradict the University's Legislation and Guideline.

- ✓ Accountability is in place; both SLNs are obligated to observing the University's operational procedures, maintaining financial records and auditing the financial resources of their respective organization; the preparation and publication of its financial reports.

Interviewee from the Dean of Students was asked a set of questions: How does the University recognize student-led initiatives? In response to former question, his responses reaffirmed what the student participants reported, regarding legality, the informant reaffirmed 'like others, both MSC and FSA are formally registered student organizations, he added "they maintain officially recognized certificate, subject to yearly renewal."

In short, all sources pointed out that the common trends of student organization' initiation and formation start by individuals or small circle groups of people who share a concern, common interest, or a passion about a cause they want to promote/challenge. The Table below presents organizational characteristics.

Table 1: Organizational nature of studied student-led networks

| Name | Year of establishment | Org. Type | Management body | Leadership style, and tenure | Membership |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------|--|---|--|
| Female Students Association (FSA) | 2003 | Formally recognized | Hierarchical, 13 members. The committee is drawn from 13 colleges of the University. | Elected through open competition. 13 colleges represent one | Founders and successors are female; |
| Male Solidarity Club (MSC) | 2015 | Formally recognized | Hierarchical, 8 management committee, 5 males and 3 females | Elected through open competition | Mixed gender; Recruit members every year |
| Yellow Movement (YM) | 2011 | unrecognized, informal | Flat, No permanent mgt. body | Team management | Founders and successors are female; |

Source: Interviews

According to the findings from internal documents and interviews, student organizations that are formally registered tend to have a hierarchical structure, while informal movements tend to have a flat structure. Among the three SLNs, one (FSA) has involved men in some collaborative initiatives such as community service, organizing tutors, skills trainers, intergroup committee, and community events. These collaborations are mechanisms of collective action that can be initiated by either the group or the university offices. The second one, Male Solidarity, is a male-majority club, but females are actively involved in all aspects of training, counseling, and advocacy work. The third SLN, the YM, is a women-only network that connects volunteers, also called “change agents,” and target individuals and groups. The movement does not aggressively recruit members, and the existing members, including alumni, are about 40, all women. This organization, also known as the “girls club,” focuses on empowering and mobilizing young women volunteers as agents and targets for change. According to the interview results, the reason for not recruiting large members has a philosophical dimension. It is said that “any young

woman who recognizes their cause and is willing to commit knowledge and time can join the network.” This declaration is consistent with information accessed from an affiliated website that states: “It [YM] especially targets and empowers young women to take an active role in combating gender inequality.” In both cases, the target groups are characterized by gender (women) and age (young), which sets the criteria for inclusion/exclusion in terms of membership.

But there appears contradiction in terms of membership criteria if we contrast the aforesaid statements against information officially posted in the AAU’s website about “*Who can be a member?*” in which it states “*Anyone willing to invest time and energy to create a safer world for women and children can be a member/volunteer of the Yellow Movement.*” This description indicates genderless and age-inclusive criteria. One possible exaptation may be the need to diplomatically communicate one’s policy to the general audience, including the AAU that prohibits placing discriminatory rules by students’ background characteristics.

All in all, by collating the interview data with written sources (documents), it can be safely concluded that YM seems to believe that not ‘anyone’ who may be willing to becoming member/volunteer but change comes by those who are perceived to share the values and principles of feminist values. This study confirmed that YM’s conviction to be labeled as “feminist movement” as mentioned in previous studies (e.g., Addisalem, 2020). In the discussions to follow this knowledge allows us to understanding of the ideological values of collective action and describe whether there is an association between ideological perspectives and pathways to achieving objectives of members and targets (Borges et al., 2017).

4.2.3. Leadership Practices

Leadership in this study refers to network leaders who assume functions and mandates of the organization; include decision-making in the interest of members or the organization’ objectives, and accountability (Klemenčič 2014). This definition is agreeable to examine the role of formal leadership for advancing gender equality, as in the case of the University’s Gender Office, the FSA, and MSC which have defined organizational practices. In this study, we also examine the YM informal leadership forms that can take, for example, teachers, activists and celebrities as role models and agents of change. Therefore, it needs a broadened definition of leadership in formal and informal leadership context (Powell & Grubbström, 2021).

4.2.3.1. Formal Leadership (FSA and MSC)

To begin with, MSC's management body consists of 8 management committee who are expected to make difference as role models and agents of change at the university. The role of formal leaders is recognized by the University and by more than 600 members during the time of data collection. It has vertical line of decision making practice that abides to formally recognized task divisions and the internal rules dictates responsibilities and conducts of MSC's management body. Formal communication in place is expected to define the behaviours of an incumbent president, leaders committee, and overall chain of communications. The same characteristics apply to FSA, except in some aspects such as leaders' selection process, discussed below.

The FSA can be treated as exercising umbrella leadership, because management body are responsible to coordinate University-wide gender clubs which form the FSA network across the 13 college campuses under AAU. It means that, every college campus, under AAU, has its own students' groups (or clubs) instituted under the FSA network. Each club has a president who reports to FSA president. In other words, for example, the FSA is University-wide association whose members are the 13 college-specific girls' club. At the beginning of every academic year, new presidents are elected by members of respective clubs. In the end, club presidents come together in order to *elect runner* candidates for the Association's office- based on the main campus.

Placement of president's position is based on competitive process and a fascinating practice *per se*. This process follows some key steps highlights below. *Step 1-* All college-based club presidents are invited to compete for the position. At this stage, three to four of them are elected on the basis of subjective criteria. *Step 2-* the elected candidates are invited to compete one another by designing a proposal that includes action plan. *Step 3-* the candidates present and defend their proposal to an appraisal committee drawn from students' dean, gender office, students' union, and other student observers. This committee gives marks for every presenter based on predefined criteria. Finally, the aggregated mark brings the winner into the presidential position. Every year, the same competition holds for selecting a president given the incumbent remains in power for one year term. The findings of this study suggested that election to the president position at clubs is transparent and the one-year tenure is respected. On top of

interview data, documents reviewed also confirmed that there are established practices of keeping minutes of meetings, signed and documented decisions.

FSA and MSC exhibit both similarities and differences. Of the common features shared by FSA and MSC is an accountability and transparency mechanism. In connection to financial management practices among registered student organizations in the University, findings show that applying standard financial management practices is required of them. There were written evidences showing accountability mechanisms placed by the student organizations, encompasses: planning and budgeting system, implementation of the budget, preparing financial records, reporting and making accessible for yearly audit.

Overall, for FSA and MSC, the formalization and governance arrangements were made in adherence to the University rules and procedures. Likewise, general assembly exercises rights of democratic election of its top three officers (president, vice president and treasurer). Normally, the Dean of Student (DS) observes legitimacy of the process, and it has to recognize the validity of procedures related to election, replacement or resignation of top officers.

4.2.3.2. Informal Leadership

In the YM's case, key informants described that there is 'no prescribed or recommended rules & procedures' that defines the responsibility of leaders in the Movement. From experience, key informants believed that change agents were taking free-will initiatives at different times. Still, team-based leadership appears to take responsibility as group network, whose members hold the inner circle, with advanced education in law, leadership, gender, and civic rights happened to take responsibility to facilitate, mentor, coordinate, champion and implement initiatives in the existing chambers at Addis Ababa, Mekelle, and Hawassa Universities, and beyond.

The YM "leader" (focal person) asserted that the gender equality work in the target universities is led by small informal network of individuals but as a group, all and every of them are expected to take responsibility of engagement in targeted issues with great potential to make a difference. This unique leadership model gives to what the Movement calls them 'change agents'¹ a degree of leverage regarding flexibility in terms of their relations with other actors, at least in so far as

¹ Change agents are actors who facilitate, promote, coordinate, champion and implement change in organizations (Caldwell 2006).

with the AAU gender office as well as from school of law and governance, and communication directorate.

4.2.3.3. Leadership Succession System

Leadership succession systems include: establishing who is eligible to participate in the leadership selection process, when the selection takes place, the method by which leaders are chosen (application, election, competition, etc.), and finally, the process by which organizations transmit knowledge, responsibilities, and relationships to incoming leaders (Center for Nonprofits, 2010). Exploring all these subthemes comprehensively is beyond the scope of this study. Among the most relevant dimensions to the case studies the following issues are worth examining.

Overall findings related to leadership selection practice by the formally registered and recognized student-led organizations (including FSA & MSC) in AAU indicates the processes is led by students, is based on participatory and competitive selection process. Apart from academic competencies, this exercise formal leadership positions within the university that also takes place in the interaction between people, conducted within certain accountability frameworks may have long-term impact on the leaders' career in the future. The current democratic exercise may also cultivate democratic culture among the current student leaders but tomorrows' political actors.

4.2.4. Exploring the Cause, Mission and Goals of Student-Led Networks

This study gave attention to the process of identifying and understanding the characteristics of student-led networks' common cause and intended goals. The underlying interest of the researcher is to find out the foundation (common cause) that brings students groups together in order to challenge social injustices and gender inequality. In addition to understanding students' own perspectives on gender equality, this knowledge foregrounds to analyses the adopted strategies for achieving the stated goals.

Research participants were approached to describe what social causes have been promoted by the existence of the network they belong to; what do they aspire to achieve as a result of their involvement, etc. Study participants' ideas and reflections relevant to gender equality issues were mapped around the subthemes: social cause, the mission, imagined goals. Table 2- below

summarizes key findings extracted from interviews and discussions conducted with each network representatives.

Table 2: Summary of student networks’ causes, missions and stated goals

| Name | Social cause | Mission (role) | Stated Goal |
|-------------|---|--|--|
| FSA | Perceived inequality of female students | To support female students perform better in their studies by tackling hindrances | Reducing female’s vulnerability factors to prevent them from sexual violence |
| MSC | Sexual abuse by male over female/ Perceived hostile sexism | To combat sexual abusive behavior and show that men are not only perpetrators but are women’s allies too. | Mobilizing male students to end sexual violence against women, and “promoting shared responsibility towards Gender equality and prevention of GBV” |
| YM | Gender issue- Perceived injustice against women | Advocating for gender equality and combating GBV; Empower young women to take an active role in combating gender inequality | Raise awareness on gender equality and gender-based violence , Advocate for equal treatment, autonomy, agency, freedom and so forth. |

Source: interview, websites and document review

In the above Table, we can observe the values (cause, missions and goals) are logically interconnected to each other. Moreover, it is important to observe the group level capacity for articulating collective beliefs, including the research participant’s current state of understanding about gender related issues. Main findings deductible from analysis are presented below.

The entire three studied grass root student-led networks agree on elements of addressing gender-based harassment and abuse but differ on the scope of gender issues in focus, the goals – outcome of engagement underpinning organizing and mobilizing collective initiatives. Despite

each of the three groups has its own defined social cause; all of them share in common regarding target groups- the undergraduate female students. It is useful to first explore the differences.

The YM, at its establishment had been associated to address violence committed on women, specifically two incidents- domestic violence and gang rape. Presently, YM's three intervention areas to achieve their goals are: (1) engage with AAU students to cultivate change agents; (2) raise awareness on women's rights, advocate for better treatment of women and girls; (3) Support female students with material/finance, to those who cannot afford basic necessities as they go through university life. The first-two render analytical relevance and are unpacked throughout this report.

Overall findings show that YM's engagement has been expanded from working with GBV survivors to a current stage of advocating for broad based agendas – reportedly challenging traditional gender roles, normative beatings of masculinity practices, norms and ideas. Indeed, when we look at the cause and the mission statements points to the nature of collective identities, known as “feminist movement” as they call for themselves; also indicate a sense of centering their commitments to challenge structural causes of inequality rather than seeking for equal treatment in the existing societal structures. YM is largely informed by feminist theory- radical strand to be exact- that aspires to dismantle the pre-existing patriarchal structure.

Regarding the formal student organizations (FSA & MSC), the findings suggested that they were recognized by the University to *promote welfare* and *services* to disadvantaged groups/female students rather than pursuing gender equity and social justice causes.

This dynamics can be explained through policy environment lens. Upon registration, particularly the requirement to comply with the AAU legislation on Recognition of Student Organizations (AAU, March 2019) make clear delineation for student Organizations can be formed to advance pre-defined causes: 1) representing students within their respective constituency; 2) special interest groups wishing to organize for the promotion of such causes or interests as the promotion of academic excellence, democratic culture, development; 3) prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, the promotion of the interests of disadvantaged groups, such as female students, and students with disabilities, or students from emerging cultural communities. In these domains, the goal of attaining gender equity and preventing gender violence posits ambiguity regarding mandate to take initiative becomes apparent.

Nevertheless, this study confirmed that the studied SLNs did not revise their objectives and thematic areas of engagement ever since their formation. Besides, the above stated causes (Table 2) –namely; Perceived inequality of female students (of FSA); Sexual abuse by male over female students (of MSC) – are not incorporated in their respective articles of associations. In light of this observation, the findings suggested that organizing students’ around collective forms of addressing gender related issues can start without clear sketch to a specific or definitive gender equality goal. Through time, greater clarity and maturity of ideas were reported by the leaders and members. Among these, the chief one is expressed shift from service to empowerment, agency/activism roles, which imply transformative objectives. Table 2 presents consolidated opinions indicating the evolving concerns and interests of the case studies and their constituents.

4.3. Discussion of Results

The findings presented in the preceding sections shed light on the characteristics of student-led grassroots organizations, including the different ways of organizing, leadership, focus areas as well as the experiences related to gender and gender-based violence within university settings. The perceived differences between the three networks can be traced in by looking across the origins, the frame of issues as well as the approach selected to achieve objectives, at the same time, the activities most often remain overlapping in many aspects and duplication in some instances. To understand the perceived differences, some underlying factors worth examining.

1. The studied SLNs were established at least a decade ago - FSA (2003) and MSC (2015) - but the objectives and thematic areas of engagement remained unchanged/not revised. It is unclear whether the possibility and easiness of revising the bylaws, thematic intervention areas, objectives. This point makes sense because the current student leaders were exposed to contemporary concepts of gender, women’s and girls’ rights, social activism, different forms of harassment and violence. Likewise, during data collection, all participants in the informal group discussions who represent the views of members and volunteers claimed that the motive behind their involvement in combatting GBV was resulted from deeper understanding about the problem. FSA believes that meeting the material and financial needs of female students reduces the likelihood of violence where combating GBV is the only way through reducing inequality, and YM believes that attacking patriarchy together with the

younger girls- the baby-boom generation reduces violence and gender based discrimination that leads to equality.

2. Albeit stagnation in incorporating contemporary knowledge and interests into the officially recognized objectives, the written plans and activity documents support progressively adopted objectives and focus areas of engagement. The inconsistency between the officially recognized objectives and those reported to this study can be explained by differences between what the study participants reported orally and what is actually written in their Articles of Association. Nonetheless, this result implies the University tended to translate the legal conditions to practice in more flexible pattern.
3. The studied registered SLNs (FSA & MSC) reported to have no past experience about involvement in illegitimate agendas or activities. But this does not mean there would be sanction on doing what can and should do. Interviewees made assertions on the “prohibited” engagements by registered SLNs- examples: mobilizing students for peaceful protest, unauthorized demonstration, revealing critical voices on social- or public-media, organizing informal gatherings inside campuses. These legal limitations apply to any student groups, separate or in solidarity with others. In so far, they may not see the relevance to incorporate new agendas and interests into their formal missions of engagement. Some interviewees saw funding and capacity building resources injected by external NGOs/CSOs directed to gender clubs was among drivers for the shift from mere welfare issues to addressing gender-based harassment and abuse, activism against cause gender inequality; study participants explained causes for engagement, missions and goals that their respective organization stands for.
4. Once established, it is not clear who holds the mandate to reform or restructure the formally registered student-led networks. But at the same time, the University’s policy discourages establishing new clubs or networks in similar activities/areas. The two case studies selected to this study (FSA & MSC) are formally registered despite popularly known as gender clubs but still gained independent legal recognition because the University sees them as having different missions.
5. In the existing conditions, formally registered student organizations (SLNs) have had some degree of leverage to engage in diversified activities, which extend beyond the officially recognized objectives by the University. And yet, the issues and concerns being addressed so

far were overwhelmingly limited to service and material provisions- financial aid, sanitary pad and scholastic materials to needy students, tutorial services, organizing a welcome and induction sessions to first year students, mobilizing members for blood donation. In fact, blood donation and financial aid is a common practice that all studied SLNs buy-in. The greatest limitation of FSA was underemphasizing to addresses the gendered power relations at play in University that often sustains GBV.

6. In light of this conclusion, there is no question on relevance, but the possibility and the easiness to organize new gender clubs, the possibility of transforming the existing registered SLNs, especially for FSA into strategic actor remain unclear.

Keeping the aforesaid points in mind, it can be concluded that grassroots student-led networks can expand their engagement and thereby their influence separately and collectively. Factors that constrain their contribution to sustainable change with exposure to contemporary knowledge about concepts and skills related to gender issues.

At the same time, it can be said that studied student-led networks have potential to engage in transformative result areas other than welfare activities. Connecting the nature and characteristics of the studied networks with the key goals summarize in Table 2 (above: causes, missions and stated goals), one can see that grassroots organizations have laid bare on two broad perspectives for realizing gender equality and ending gender-based violence: the gender perspective and feminist approach.

As discussed earlier, the YM views women as living under oppressive patriarchal conditions and therefore looks forward to engaging in challenging the *status quo* and demanding gender equality by “dismantling the patriarchal system.” This perspective reflects the complex ideological picture of emancipation how collective action works to build personal strength and how to confront the *status quo*.

To the opposite, the FSA more or less holds the gender perspective with central conception that sees women as contributors to/ actors in the development process (and not only as disadvantaged). Consistent with this notion, thus, the FSA’s approach for forming relations with other actors tended to be less concerned with the prevailing institutional structures. Statement mentioned to justify why they choose the existing hierarchical organizational form over informal

or flat structure converge to collective action works that combine building personal strength (of female students) and contributing to shared responsibility for the betterment of women. For FSA, the key point is their belief that building personal strength (of women and girls) on how to climb the hierarchical ladder individually and collectively within the existing social-economic structures. Therefore, the shared responsibility refers to empowering women to equally contribute to and benefit from collective progress. In this regard the issue of formality seems to have been attached to take advantage of organizational relations with University's policy and practice.

From the University perspective, gender equality can be explained as a means to comply with universally recognized vision such as ensuring equitable development goals and poverty reduction (Tsikata 2005), with Sustainable Development Goals for the period of 2016–2030, one of which focuses on providing “women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making process”(United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2017, quoted in Longman, 2018:1).

Gender equality access by women to higher education — and work needed to address the gendered power relations at play in universities that often hold the enrolled students back from their advancement remain an important points of divergence. One line of argument is “perceived universities as focusing on fixing the women rather than the structure or culture of the organization” (Longman, 2018:90). The challenge with this approach is much of the interventions focus on the women and girls changing (e.g., to enable them adjusting themselves to the environment) rather than working to fix the system that is the problem. The second line of argument is one that involves transforming gender relations by changing the organizational culture - as it means to fix the system and create a culture that would be more welcoming to women. If we analyze the findings of this study through the ongoing gender mainstreaming approach, it leads to tentatively conclude that the University is pursuing a strategy to change (or fix) the system – where the focus would be directed to transforming the structure or culture of the organization - rather than on the women and girls (Burkinshaw and White 2017).

Building on this conclusion, exploring the conditions and constraints to working together on transformation of gender relations has rendered useful starting points to understand more about role to be played by SLNs amid of collective efforts towards changing the organizational culture.

4.4. Exploring the Pathways for Change

In order to systematically explore the pathways of change from conception to practical action, this study involves understanding how current grass root student-led networks have defined the problem (gender inequality), pathways of changing the problem to reach the imagined gender equal society. Information extracted from the in-depth interviewees, informal group conversations and reviewed documents give qualitative evidence to illuminate our understanding about pathways of change among the student-led networks.

4.4.1. Conceptualization of gender through grassroots organizations lenses

As per in-depth interviewees, group conversations and respondent or reviewed written materials, it was attempted to understand how the components of gender equality defined. To begin with, it noticed that in all three studied SLNs, the term gender holds interchangeable meaning with sex in many aspects of their use. The researcher also observed the difference between sex category and gender identity were loosely meant to hold similar understanding as to corresponding identity of a male or a female person.

Unlike the contemporary literature on gender definition,² the studied SLNs consider gender system represented in binary terms (i.e., male or female); both sex identities were assumed to hold exclusive and fixed categories, and predetermined by biological factors. In this connection, no verbal or written evidence can be found out by this study to support that the studied SLNs acknowledge the sociological argument that assumes persons' sex is an *assigned identity* at birth. Instead, group discussants disclose their 'strong belief' in that being a woman or a man, or being male or female is a natural gift or in the words of xxx as a 'God-given phenomena.' This finding is very important initial to the hitherto identity related analyses, explanations and interpretations.

For the purpose of this study, the definition of sex holds the biological concept. Of relevant to this definition, the legal designation of gender in Ethiopia recognizes only two categories of gender/sex, i.e., male or female, though there are anecdotes about advocacy for a third option by international partners from the liberal world.

² For instance Brown & Toyoki (2013) describe sex in more than two categories (e.g., male or female, bisexual, gay, lesbian, straight, etc.). In the gender literature, the concept of gender identity is taken as it evolved over time to include those people who do not identify either as female or male, for example a "person's self concept of their gender (regardless of their biological sex) is called their gender identity" (xx quoting Lev, 2004, p. 397).

Majority of participants in this study reported as they “did not participate” in any gender course or gender skill training as such. And yet, all study participants were individuals composed of network leaders, senior (graduating class) members and volunteers, who are expected to assume key roles such as agenda setting, generate new ideas, inspire organizing ideology and perceptions of inequality, cultivate/craft collective identity, define the meanings and values attracted to of the SLNs. In this regard, this study’s proposition is that the values founders, alumni, academia, the government, the media and international/regional actors influence grassroots movements, particularly the gender beliefs in contemporary society (Roberts & Kwon, 2021), including the attitude of students themselves.

This study found written and oral evidences about active participants in the studied SLNs, whose agented roles include such as ‘guardians’, ‘role models’, ‘rights defenders’, ‘voices of the voiceless’, ‘mentors’, ‘counselors’. In practice, individual and group interviewees acknowledge for their being participated or facilitated trainings programs such as assertiveness, self-evaluation, self-concept, critical reflection, autonomy/ freedom to decide on personal matters – in one way or the other implied to understand gender rights concepts and practices.

Having explored the definition’s significance, let us consider the value of beliefs about gender differences and gender inequality. Summary of results presented in Table 3 indicated the general picture about the perspectives on gender inequality from experiences of grassroots. Analyzing the qualitative data in relation to gender differences and gender inequality theme has results in some key points.

Having explored the definition’s significance, consider the value of beliefs about gender differences and gender inequality. A close look at the case studies data gives opportunity to shed light on interrelated concepts of gender inequality. While it is true that each case study helps mirror the targets and values, indirectly to explain their everyday engagements and ultimately identify any misconceptions, false generalizations, uncritical support to biased attention, behavior, and interpretations of the social world (Cameron et al., 2001; Levy & Karafantis, 2008).

4.5. Strategies SLNs employed for achieving goals

4.5.1. Overview of Strategies and pathways

This section discusses study results about the second research objective “*explore the strategies employed for achieving their stated goals.*” Interviews with studied student-led networks helped understand the existence of alternative ways applied by studied networks to promote gender equality. Table 3 presents summary of self-reported qualitative information on different components of strategies adopted by the studied student-led networks in Addis Ababa University.

Table- 3: Strategies adopted by studied student-led networks

| <i>SLN</i> | <i>Focus area / Support for or participation in</i> | <i>Strategic approaches to achieve gender equality</i> |
|-----------------|--|---|
| YM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Fair justice for women (legal aid, voice, choice, reforms) ✓ Assertiveness ✓ women’s rights ✓ Equal rights ✓ Structural power and dominance | <p>Feminist approach for changing oppressive hierarchical systems and structures; including gendered role stereotypes</p> <p>Organizing awareness events for women’s liberation from patriarchal societies’ oppression and subordination;</p> <p>From individual rights to group/community rights;</p> |
| FSA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Protecting women from exploitation, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, etc. ✓ Female students competence ✓ Assertiveness | <p>Empowering female students’ capacity to achieve gender equity and welfare approach.</p> |
| MS C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Male participation on intergroup platforms ✓ Reducing sexual harassment ✓ Shifting male culture --modeling, influence bystander male groups to shift in active defenders of women’s cause. ✓ Men's active participation in eliminating GBV. | <p>Solidarity for engagement for collective protection, behavioral change action and reduce abuse against women;</p> <p>Practical role: Mobilizing men's active participation in eliminating GBV, sensitize (bystanders , tolerance and cover up abuses) , whistle blower, witness, empowerment (tutorial)</p> |

Source: interview with network leaders (November 2021)

Table-3 presents summary of strategies and practices extracted from interviews and document reviews. Note that these are not mutually exclusive because the researcher asked study cases to identify those relevant to promote gender equality or address any gender issues.

4.5.2. Empowerment as strategy to promote gender equality

Table-4: University students’ Path to Empowerment

| Dimensions of empowerment | Definition of empowerment | Evidence in practice |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| <i>Personal:</i> | developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and ruining the effects of internalized oppression | MSC: Skill training (negotiation, assertiveness); FSA&YM SRH training; computer skill training; tutorial classes; counseling, financial support, scholastic and personal hygiene materials support; YM: mentoring, organizing intergroup discourse, organizing coffee ceremonies for female students to talk about their lived experiences, and financial support. |
| Close relationships: | Developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and decisions made within it. | FSA& MSC: Awareness creation orientation, induction to university life; Mentoring young women about developing the ability to negotiate with family and love relationships (dating arguments); events (valentine’s day). case-based counseling. <i>Legal aid</i> , including referral process; mediation/reconciliation of light arguments. YM: for girls and women to make their voice, choices and power (agency). |
| Collective action: | Target individuals work together to achieve a more extensive | YM: participates at national youth network (digital innovation network) at UN women, |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <p>impact than each could have had alone. This includes involvement in political structures, but might also cover collective action based on cooperation rather than competition. Collective action may be locally focused – for example, at village or neighborhood level – or institutional, such as national networks or grass root groups.</p> | <p>some campaigns, participation panel discussion. Mainstream media and social media activism questioning culture, health services, and the justice system that favor perpetrators.</p> <p>Digital engagement as way of networking with feminist allies, communicating and campaigning women’s rights.</p> |
|--|--|--|

Despite the initiatives to develop self and individual confidence and capacity, in face-to-face discussions, the researcher noted that female students participate less than male students during mixed group sessions, while they (female students) are more likely to participate at women-only platforms. Also, female students are less represented in male solidary clubs and more represented in women-led collective action.

Empowerment is crucial to achieve gender equality. Girls’ empowerment as defined by Save The Children refers to “positive transformation of unequal power relations, and elimination of discriminatory norms, thereby girls have equal control, choices and voice over their lives and in society now and for the future (agency).” In this framework, empowerment is considered not as goal by itself but as means to achieve equality (i.e., a strategy).

When asked how and why the SLN selected this strategy over others, they are mainly informed by feminist ideology which underscores women empowerment as a major tool to freedom from the scourge of male oppression and subordination.

Awareness raising activity, as part of female’s individual empowerment, focuses on SRH (sexual and reproductive health) issue that entails: sexuality, unsafe sex, safe use of condom, unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, including where to report to assaults or attempted assaults, settling dating arguments peacefully, and boosting up negotiation and bargaining power of female students, getting their voices heard, choice and bodily control

and integrity, realizing personal agency. These are crucial issues addressed by student-led networks (SLN) as a tool to achieve their stipulated goals. To wrap up, empowerment encompasses awareness-raising, education and capacity building. These networks build the SRH skills, knowledge and self-confidence and building personal agency. Marcus (2018) affirmed that girls empowerment through girls clubs plays a huge role in building the self-confidence, knowledge, and social network skills of adolescent girls. Such clubs/ networks help girls to envision better future and widen their horizons.

As mentioned above, student-led networks were established targeting female university students. Basically, however, empowerment approach in this study refers to the FSA as they perform two major activities in order to achieve their stipulated goals. These are basic needs (including service delivery).

FSA identified gaps that expose female students to sexual assault- that is computer-based tutorial service. They arranged a tutorial support to students who were from rural background and who have never had computer access in their locality. When they joined university, assignments are composed using computers. Hence, female students need support from Male classmates and teachers, and male student need sexual favor in return and female students feel like responding to sexual favors is a perceived obligation; failing to comply with this would cause verbal harassment and physical assault, said the participants of this study.

Empowerment mainly involves Awareness raising, protection from sexual violence so that female students eschew transactional sex for better grades with teachers. Findings confirmed that student-led networks were engaged in awareness raising tasks as a step forward to address sexual violence on campus.

4.5.3. Service Delivery to Promote Gender Equality

In this study, service delivery can be taken as Hyde (1987:17) asserted: “Service strategies encompass the disseminating of information, dispensing of medical care, supplying of legal consultation, and providing of refuge and sanctuary.” Currently provided services by the networks include: financial aid to needy students, scholastic materials, and sanitary pads in order to reduce sexual exploitation, attrition and dropout rates due to materials and financial shortfalls.

Over the past decade, the FSA has been prominent player in providing service by targeting female student exclusively and those with poor economic backgrounds. The list of reported service delivered include: financial aid, sanitary pad and scholastic materials to needy students, tutorial services, organizing a welcome and induction sessions to first year students, mobilizing members for blood donation events twice a year. Significant portion of this activity was predominantly executed by FSA&YM being inspired by key message ‘to save maternal deaths during child delivery due to lack of blood.’

The target university is not very responsive to issues of transactional sex” that older rich men trap young female students in sexual relations by offering temporal incentives.

A female student participant from MSC expressed her views:

“Senior female students (and male) involve in orchestrating asymmetrical sexual relations between young female students and sugar daddies [older rich men], but the university is not very responsive to issues of transactional sex. The predators are ruining the life of innocent young students. The rich men abandon a previous one by replacing her with other every time and then, victims become subject to sexually transmitted diseases, substance abuse, or/and alcohol-sex-dependence-prone exploitation.”

In addition, YM leader (focal person) explained:

“As a feminist student gender activist, I believe there is a long journey to be traveled before gender equality becomes priority agenda, but I think it was great to share strategies and challenges among us. Not only because it gives us an insight of what the situation looks like in the chambers and how each chamber faces its own challenges, but also to share experiences, to learn from each other and to build up a community that is aware of this issue, and that is willing to change the current situation.”

Awareness raising according to Heisecke and werner (2014) stated the importance of awareness raising on violence against women “violence against women and domestic violence is the first step in changing attitudes and behavior that perpetuate or condone the various forms of violence against women (p.5).” Results found out that, apart from creating awareness, they used different strategies for victims to use during attempted sexual harassment such as recording phone calls, saving text messages, etc. Evidence is very important for student-led networks to hold

perpetrators accountable. Data confirmed that few empowered female students (members of networks) experienced attempted sexual assault and were successful in protecting themselves using the aforementioned strategies.

Box 1. Case story

I am Martha (whose name is changed for privacy reason) was one of a student-led network's presidents a couple of years ago. To graduate, I had to do a thesis work, so a male advisor was assigned to me to help me do the research. As time went by my advisor started arguing with me with the pretext that my study is nothing if he never supports me. I was confused. My adviser gave me two options if I want to get graduated. Option number one was to have sexual relations with him, earning better grade and graduate with no problem. Option number two was getting incomplete because of failing to meet his sexual demand. I started thinking again and again and I came up with an idea. I started pretending as if I agree with his demand and I said ok to option number one and began to record all conversations and saved text messages for evidence. I reported the case to Gender Office Directress. Together with AAU gender office directress, I rang him and fixed an appointment time and place and went there with the directress.

He met with us (me and the directress). It was very dishonorable for him to see me with another person who he knows very well. We gave him a choice either to take the case into court or remaining supportive to her as a responsible educated man. He was apologetic to the directress but disappointed at me. However, considering the psychological impacts of both me and me adviser, the gender office directress urged the department to replace him by another adviser but the case was not overtly stated to the department though. I did this because I was student-led network management member and that empowered to defend myself and other victims like me. What about other female students who have been facing similar problem? It needs further study though.

Source: in-depth interview

4.5.4. Activism for change

The first strategy is **Table Day Activism**- tables are organized in the campus streets and passersby involve in various gender issues. Different agenda in regard to gender are set by organizers. The document review, as one of the tools to data collection, confirmed that different gender issues were presented for discussion during a table day activism. This strategy was mainly used by Yellow Movement and male solidarity club. For example, **16 day activism**-agenda is set by UN Women though. 16 day activism was launched in November. **Agenda** ‘let peace prevail! End GBV against women and children’. Student-led networks receive agenda from the UN women and organizing an open discussion on their respective campus.

The second strategy is organizing coffee ceremonies. In this session, anyone is invited to have coffee, stories are told, and members and non-members talk about their lived experiences. This creates an opportunity for victims to talk about their lived experiences as it encourages people to be brave and assertive in telling stories (bad or good). The third strategy is ‘book club’. This strategy is particularly used to encourage people to discuss a book in gender perspective, what issues are covered in a book which is selected by organizers. Participants are encouraged to apply a gender lens while discussing. Book clubs have been both social and political spaces, fostering both friendship and social change. They are critical of patriarchal norms. The fourth strategy is fund raising by organizing a literary art event such as films, and by directly contacting companies such as Unilever- for different kit- toothpaste with brushes to needy students.

Last but not least, engage with media to popularize themselves, social media and other media outlets to reach as more audiences as they can. Yellow Movement is a prime example in this regard. They use social media such as instagram, facebook and twitter and were able to get more followers. The last one is networks organizing a **debate session** that involves both men and women on a range of gender-related issues.

4.5.5. Bystander strategy

It is also revealed that networks employ a ‘**Bystanders program as a strategy to address GBV**’. Bystander strategy is an encouragement of students who do not involve in violence in any way. For example, this strategy helps onlookers to get involved by not involving in intentional or unintentional harassments, by witnessing to harassments, by condemning violence and so on. It

encourages young people to intervene when witnessing incidents or warning signs of sexual assault. It increases **bystander** intervention and engagement and efficacy. Bystander programs seek to sensitize young people to warning signs of sexual assault, create attitudinal changes that foster bystander responsibility for intervening (e.g., creating empathy for victims), and build requisite skills and knowledge of tactics for taking action (Banyard, 2014). This strategy was used by networks in order to encourage students on campus to take the initiative in combating campus-based harassments.

4.6. Roles and contributions of student organizations and movements

Among the notable intervention, student-led networks identified gaps and attempted to fill skills with Computer training to female students with rural background. The student-led networks believed this gap exacerbates the likelihood of sexual violence/exploitation by male students who offer technology (computer service) with expectation of sexual return from the recipients' side.

The intervention has relevance in the university context. Female students from rural background do not have access to computer and computer skills. Assignments are all performed by computer and acquiring a computer skill is mandatory while they are in the university. This makes them dependent on male classmates or sometimes on teachers. Group participant students underscored that access to computer/computer skills was found to be the major factor that drives female students to engage in sexual relations with male computer-supporters. In this gender-power relation, female students might have perceived obligation of meeting the sexual demands in response to the support provided by male counterparts.

The efficacy of this intervention seems questionable in that despite the targeted managed to acquire computer skills, lack of the hardware is likely to remain being a challenge. Many argued for efficacy of this intervention in terms of career development *per se*; adding that given computer using skills, students can access the hardware by borrowing from friends or can use at ICT centers in the University. Some others tended to link between widely rumored relations with rich men who exchange sex for personal laptops (and high-tech cell phones). The point is that the same girls who were being trained on computer skills are likely prey for rich predators.

Having understood the magnitude of sexual exploitations, FSA&YM incorporated providing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education, critical thinking, and negotiation skills-particularly to first year entrants.

Informants had mixed reactions about the effects of these efforts. For some, citing anecdotes of high abortion rate, contracting infection from sexually transmittable diseases, withdrawals and drop outs among female students suggest ineffectiveness and/or inadequacy of interventions in place. The FSA&YM leaders reject this supposition. In illustrating their point, the FSA leader said: *“the magnitude in every perceived or real problem could have been by far worst that one can imagine. In contrast, the persistence of problems evidences the importance of our involvement, the depth of the issues; the scope of work undone.”*

Informants also mentioned experimenting addictions substances/ drugs, early debut to sexual practices while they were at junior and high schools tended to complicate the university life among female students. All the three studied networks shared their perception on challenges that emanate from targets background context coupled with patriarchal culture that never condemns violence perpetrated against women: All the three studied networks agree that organizing gender works in the university was demanding given

The study found out that

- Networks (yellow movement) were able to lobby AAU to formulate anti-harassment law.
- In collaboration with gender office and other donors (SIDA, Aster Zewde foundation and so on), they were able to create scholarship opportunity for more than 200 female students. And SLNs role was to assess the involvement and participation track record of beneficiaries as a member of the network during their undergraduate time.
- Rescued more than 10 victims of sexual assault (three rape cases) who were pregnant, rejected by their family members, integrated them to AWSAD (Association for Women’s Sanctuary and Development). Networks supported victims to continue their study by providing all necessary materials and other financial supports as well in collaboration with the aforementioned organizations.
- Members in the management committee achieved personal and collective agency. They improved their leadership, critical thinking and interpersonal communication skills apart from combating gender injustices.

The study did find out notable evidence to support that SLNs play a role or in challenging gendered norms and relations, including the role of male solidarity in developing women's leadership.

In spite of the sensitization, personal empowerment interventions, this research found reporting GBV committed against female students remains to be absurd. The studied networks being unable to bring a breakthrough on this concern would be considered a failure that their contribution as a pathway to gender equality is remained questionable but limited institutional response plays a huge role for their failure. However, their effort is found to be a pathway to defeat injustices.

FSA follows empowering women to achieve gender equity. It combines basic needs approach and instrumentalist instrumental approach. The basic needs approach/ instrumental approach are both focused on the practical, immediate delivery of aid in the short-term and gender mainstreaming in all spheres of life (social, political, economic). The association leaders explained their belief in favor for gender mainstreaming in existing systems and structures can address women's issues through various ways. Providing quality education and training is the best possible solution to realize structural changes in long-term. It is worthwhile to note that the association out to have defined theory and perspectives in addressing gender inequality,

4.7. Challenges Facing SLNs

This study finally explored major challenges (factors and conditions) affecting groups and collective actions from promoting gender equality. The findings revealed that student-led networks are surrounded by multiple challenges. The challenges facing student-led networks are categorized mainly into two: internal and external.

4.7.1. Internal challenges reported by participants:

First, members are not on the same page for the cause and this affects achieving shared goals. Second, some members do not have patterned gender skills in order to skillfully perform gender-related activities in a manner that serves as a pathway to gender equality. More importantly, members do not spare time as they lack understanding the cause and more inspired by extrinsic motivation like scholarship opportunities and meager subsistence. The temptation to free-ride and the fear of inefficacy is also another daunting problem.

4.7.2. The external challenges involve:

Lack of infrastructures like rooms for physical address, conducting periodic meetings and dearth of hotlines for victims to secretly report is regarded as a problem. Second, time management affects the amount of time each member devotes to the success of their network reduces and lack of incentives as *'quid pro qua'*. Third, limited responsiveness to cases of violence and lengthy bureaucracy by university administration was remarked to be the daunting challenge, one of the interviewees said, *"the university is not responsive to reported cases of violence and if the university administration responds, it usually takes longer time and in between, our attention would be shifted to another agenda."* Last but not least is the bystander bullying and **backlashes**-being dubbed as collectives of lesbians, homosexuals, *"ugly cannot find a boyfriend"* kind of phrases from bystander students to demotivate upstanders. Informants also recalled being labeled by some university community against professed or perceived feminists such as – 'anti-culture', 'anti-religion', 'male-haters', 'devoid of woman-ness', 'psychopaths' and so on. This implies indemnification with feminist approaches to continue to be highly stigmatized. One of the interview participants from FSA expressed:

"Bystanders call us bunch of collectives of lesbians, radical feminists. Wherever we go to the canteen, dormitory, library, and whatever we do there are backlashes but we feel nothing about it because perpetrators always try to stop us from doing our job. No bad guy (perpetrator) can tell us what to do and what not to do. Even sometimes our class mates seem to avoid doing group assignment with us (SLN management members). Whatever backlash we receive, we can't stop our job. We are against injustice. We know our cause for the struggle. As long as the problem continues, we will continue the struggle."

(source: interview from YM participant)

This clearly states the fact that challenges are multi-faceted ranging from verbal backlashes to academic suppression. They are committed to pass gatekeepers and roadblocks, and challenges.

Gender skill gap: refers to the lack of appropriate knowledge to work on variety of gender issues. This gap can possibly be filled with various related trainings.

The study found out that most SLN participants do have a gender skill gap. In regard to this, further question was pondered to them “*Did you get any gender related training organized by gender office?*” and all student-led network participants replied “NO”.

Similar question was posed to key informant participants “*Do you train student-led networks to get them equipped with contemporary gender concepts and skills?*” And they replied “No”. For a follow up question “*why?*” Their response was “*we don’t have experts and we, very often, requested the AAU center for gender studies (CGS)department to support us in this regard but that didn’t happen. We don’t normally work together as if we are contenders,*” the participant added.

The study concludes that SLN have gender skill gaps remains impediment for effective intervention, and trainings to fill this gap is not organized by designated office for gender equality to get realized, and the attributed cause is lack of collaborative support with Center for gender studies though this needs the views of the AAU center for gender studies (CGS).

Coordination gaps: AAU gender office and center for gender studies have potential role to deepen gender consciousness if they work together. Currently, the Gender office is attempting to closely work with clubs, including the studied formal student-led networks. But, the Office admitted it lacks trained resource persons as factors for not delivering gender trainings to clubs and the university community. The Center can deliver the needed lectures, seminars or trainings.

When asked to explain what was constraining them from spearheading their efforts towards shared/common pathway of gender equality goals, their responses indicated that there exist some divergences in approaches and organizational capacity to address gendered injustices.

Strategy pathway clarity gaps: The university Gender office and FSA tended to focus on service provision in responses to existing inequalities and injustices. For example, service delivery or welfare response to poor female students, addressing the needs of sexual assault victims, holding perpetrators accountable, etc, can be categorized as response to injustice consequences rather than root causes of unbalanced and unequal power relations. Cultural change and structural reforms such as unequal student-teacher relations, unequal male-female students relations are remained to be sidelined.

The YM claims to have primarily concerned on these change dimensions. However, its legitimacy and acceptance among the university community remains questionable. Some interviewed participants for the movement indicated that although they desired to make changes in their approaches to address gender problems such as activism for system changes, cultural transformation.

When asked to explain what was constraining them from reorganizing their engagements towards transformational changes, analyses of their responses highlight the following gender skill gaps and indicators:

- This study found evidences of perceiving the path to gender equality as exclusively working with/on/ for women, despite the fact that gender and women's issues are different. In this regard, empowering female students in order to reduce the likelihood of sexual violence manifests oversimplified approach pursued by the students' networks to solve the complex and multilayered problem.
- The studied networks lack the knowledge of essential gender strategies and application of gender analytic tools. Given the evidenced assumption that gender analysis, i.e. conducting gender analysis as a baseline is necessary for any intervention- small or big – interviewed network leaders revealed they did not have prior experience on the tool. This gap is of paramount limitation of the networks. Because such analysis result tells us who needs what? Who does/has what? Who decides what? Answering these questions could offer good entry points to addressing multifaceted gender injustices. In light of this observation, however, student-led networks intuitively identified computer skills gap and they tried to fill it by providing training to female students in order to reduce the likelihood of sexual violence.

Material and financial constraints: Respondents were asked if they have had support in resources and level of the support. The two formal networks get regular budgetary support from the University. On one hand, the allocation of public budget to support extra-curricular clubs and activities needs appreciation and acknowledgement. On the other hand, student-led networks perceived the level of support from the university is inadequate to bring visible change as it only covers operational costs and allowances.

The University has set conditions of formal student organization that also creates pre-condition for funding eligibility. Only those which are registered and formally adhered with the university's objectives can get the support.

The support level is small while it requires lengthy bureaucracy and sometimes there are discouraging remarks. In this case, participants from both formal organizations (and group discussants and key informants) agree that the institutional support is minimal and bureaucratic. SLNs are subject to systemic surveillance by dean of students. The most intrusive systemic surveillance on formal SLNs by AAU dean of students put some level of pressure on voluntary members and affects their performances. Role clarity gap between dean of students and gender office remained to be so confusing.

The informal version of student-led networks- the Yellow Movement - does not expect financial or material support from the university. All respondents from this network stated that they don't want to be formally registered as this gives them the leverage to expand their networks and work freely though accountability is lacking.

As explained before, institutional support is conditional to formal relationship. Dean office supports registered ones and gender office closely works with the informal ones. The informal ones survive because of the support from gender office and raise funds during the Valentine's Day. There are two blocks. How unregistered ones function in the university if the university has a club establishment guideline? This is a sideline question. The guideline clearly states "To function on campus, students should register and get recognition". No one was able to answer why YM is still functioning on campus. The study came to a conclusion that registration is not only for funding, but also to not for operating in the university campus. The YM organizes during 'Table Day' that enhances a heated-discussion involving any passersby on various meticulously set gender issues, but campus guards do not let them (YM) organize such an event without permission letter issued by the Dean of Students but that seems to be not very serious as one of YM participants described:

“we can’t get permission letter from the dean of students as we are not registered. We have strong work relation with gender office instead. Sometimes, when we want to organize Table Day, we face a problem as the campus guards demand us to show them permission letter which we can’t get one. We beg the guards to leave us alone stating that we will not stay for long and our agendas are non-political, non-religious and non- ethnic based. And the guards are not bad to us.” Laughter!

(Source: interview with YM participant)

CHAPTER FIVE

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Concluding Summary

Drawing on social identity and self-categorization approaches to collective action from social psychology point of view, this thesis attempted to investigate the characteristics, motivations, group interest and experiences of campus-based student networks in connection to efforts of gender equalities. Some key conclusions were drawn based on three cases which actively engaged in promoting female students causes at Addis Ababa University.

While formal Student-led networks adopted formally recognized organizational structures with positions and hierarchies defined by internal guideline, the YM has no defined organizational setup. The organizational structures are tailored to the working environment and the collective actions intentions. It can be concluded that formal student organizations are suitable for community service deliveries rather than undertaking gender advocacy and activism.

Being formally registered and recognized by the University hierarchies has implication on organizational autonomy as well as group efficacy. Findings of this study indicate that formal and registered SLNs are to report to the dean of students; so organizing collective events and setting new agendas were found to be limited to those requested for prior approval by/ given permission from the University. For example, in response to sexual abuse cases reportedly committed by teachers, thesis advisers, male students, or other university staff, none of studied networks exerted meaningful pressure on the University hierarchies. Without addressing the instructional culture, an empowering strategy targeting female students has proved to be one-sided and overtly simplified solution to a very complex and challenging problem. This conclusion is shared by the Yellow Movement (grass root collective feminists group).

The University has placed registration guideline as a requirement for any student-led initiatives to register and function on campus. However, the university is not strict on unregistered student-led movements like YM, and the guideline lacks clarity on the measures to be taken for student-led networks who failed to get registered and operate on campus. It remains unclear whether and to what extent the University gender office and student organizations are working together. Yet, the mandate to oversee all gender related initiatives is given to students' dean office. But clubs

who are working on gender issues are mentored and monitored by AAU by the dean of students instead of the gender office under existing organizational structures. The YM exclusively works with gender office but on the mercy of gender office. Gender office works with unregistered SLN (YM), on contrary, the dean of students doesn't recognize the existence of YM on campus. The problem observed here is that though the dean of students is in charge of registering SLNs, it is not the right regulatory body to SLNs who try to address gender issues and a mechanism should have been devised by the University that directly grants gender office the responsibility to mentor and control all the activities of SLNs who, one way or the other, work on gender issues.

The study examined how and why students get mobilized for women's cause or gender equality issues, all networks understudy- Female Students Association (FSA) and Male Solidarity Club (MSC) and Yellow Movement (YM)- were established for a gender cause. Inconsistent and many times contradictory framing gender issues will impact collaborative work as they engage wider challenges. The feminist movement contrasts male solidarity in defining gender, women's rights and principles. The way they theorize the problem guides their modality of intervention.

Formally registered student-led networks organize volunteer members for collective action in response to less advantaged groups. But their approaches are monolithic, fixed, and structurally bounded to the university system. They especially target and empower female students to bring greater equality for women. These actors have demonstrated their potential by playing visible role in mobilizing voluntary students for providing academic support for needy students. However, they lack effective and innovative resources mobilization to complement the limited resources they receive from the university and a couple of private companies.

Unlike its historical role in political movements, student-led activism in AAU in connection to gender-based injustices is barely existent. Feminist ideologies and principles are something unknown to most participants in both conceptual and practical aspects except the name 'feminism' as man-haters, deviants and anti-established culture. Exceptionally, the YM as reflected in their focus areas and group interests can be considered largely influenced and informed by the feminist ideologies. But it was found difficult to categorically classify them into one strand of feminism though their intervention/understanding of the gender issue has a striking similarity with radical feminism as both aspire to see the existing patriarchal system that systematically and disproportionately oppresses women dismantled.

This study was unable to document convincing evidences supporting the efficacy of the formal student networks in combating gender-based violence. The males' subgroups targeted to change bystander culture and female students targeted by empowerment activities have yet to prove worth of combating rape, sexual exploitation, physical and psychological abuses perpetrated by men against female students.

Based on qualitative evidences, it is concluded that feminist movements tend to be most successful when they work by and with young women with exposure to gender, women's rights and feminist activism principles. They create more attention, more innovative in fundraising, focused in targeting their interventions, have better intellectual backup. In short, for feminist movements, informal network gives some freedom to operate in and outside the university, to work on various agenda, get connected with dynamic individuals and groups. Hence, to entertain this freedom, they remained to be unregistered and informal.

The central questions this study was to answer is whether students' voluntary initiatives (clubs, movements, networks) has a real potential to serve as a pathway to enhance gender equality. To wrap up, despite both internal and external challenges, lack of proper training, unfavorable gendered norms on the target campus and beyond, this study was able to document convincing evidences to support that students' collective in the target university can be real alternatives/pathways to promote gender equality.

5.2. Recommendations

A concerted effort should be put in place to reduce inequalities and achieve equality. Hence, it is recommended that student-led networks, as one of stakeholders, are bold forces whose commitments and activities can immensely support the institution's effort to realize gender equality. These are:

1. Equipping SLNs with conceptual and analytical skills using short-term training, with focus on gender skills, leadership and resource mobilization;
2. The target institute should move forward to realize gender equality by mainstreaming gender as it paves the way for networks to perform their tasks. It is true that the target institute has formulated a gender policy in 2015 and implementation guideline in June, 2020- five years later-during the revision. And having a gender policy doesn't ensure that gender is mainstreamed or institutionalized. In spite of gender skill gaps, Student-led networks are doing their best in order to support gender equality efforts by vividly combating sexual violence and empowering the disadvantaged, and more importantly, they are doing a prevention work by identifying gaps for vulnerability to sexual assault.
3. Student-led networks should receive appropriate training/ mentorship to equip them with the appropriate gender skills and they should also get funding by different stakeholders who want to see gender based discriminations reduced, sexual violence eliminated and gender justice enhanced, and equality realized. Student-led networks should be able to engage in more gender advocacy works than financial provision to female students from poor background. That should be the university's work through social corporate responsibilities.
4. SLNs who are working on gender issues should be mentored and monitored by AAU gender office instead of the student dean office under existing organizational structures. The dean of students should not be the right regulatory body to SLNs who try to address gender issues and a mechanism should be devised by the University that directly grants gender office the responsibility to mentor and control all the activities of SLNs who , one way or the other, work on gender issues.
5. More importantly and practically, the institute's gender office and AAU- center for gender studies (CGS) should work in close collaboration in order to realize what they aspire to achieve by empowering student-led networks through various capacity building trainings.

Change should start from self- it sounds absolute naivety to expect other departments to be gender aware while the designated office/ sector fails to do so.

6. Based on this study findings, evidence-based complain against sexual violence found to be effective tool in mobilizing male students for the cause. Therefore, in-depth multidisciplinary studies from social psychology, communicative relations, and gender relations are highly recommended.

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APPENDICES

Appndex-1

Data Collection Instruments

This instrument comprises all the tools (in-depth interview, key informant interview and FGD) needed to gather the required data.

A- in-depth interview questions (students' presidents and vice presidents).

First of all, I would like to thank you your time and cooperation for this interview. This interview will be kept confidential and will not, in any way, be disclosed to third party. The information you provide will solely be used for a research purpose, not for commercial or any other purpose and it will remain to be anonymous. It will be recorded. You can use either English or Amharic- it is at your discretion. You can stop any time you feel uncomfortable. Can we start?

Organizational set up

1. What is your responsibility in the network?
2. Have taken any gender-related course or attended any training on gender?
3. how do you balance engaging in such networks and academic activities? does it affect you academic success?
4. When was it founded?
5. Who founded it?
6. What was the cause for founding it?
7. How was it founded? by following some guidelines or arbitrarily?
8. How many members are there currently?
9. Do you have beneficiaries and members' gender disaggregated data?
10. How do you recruit members? How do you approach them?
11. How do you describe missions, visions, and objectives of your network?

Practices and achievements

1. What activities have you been executing ever since the beginning?
2. Do you feel you achieved your goals?
3. Why collective action? How does the network categorize its members' category/identity (e.g., an inclusive self-categorization, exclusive shared/common goal criteria, sympathizers of the cause etc)?

4. How do you engage with individuals, groups (e.g., clubs, movements, abuse survivors, providers, etc.), authorities, donors?
5. What do you understand about activism and advocacy?
6. Do you feel that you are an activist or advocate of gender?
7. What strategy (ies) you use to accomplish your tasks?
8. what media outlets you use to reach out more audiences and members?
9. What level of support do you get in the university?
10. Do you raise fund by yourself?
11. How do you fundraise? what strategies come to play?
12. Do you request approval letter from the institute during fundraising both on and off campus?
13. what is your financial management practice(track record) like?
14. Does Addis Ababa University have a gender equality policy?
15. Do you feel gender inequalities are reduced and gender equality policy is implemented in the university?
16. How helpful is a gender policy for you to accomplish your goals?
17. what can you say about gender based violence on campus?
18. How often do you receive reports of sexual harassment?
19. what do you do if you receive reports of violence or attempted harassment?
20. How common is abortion and unintended pregnancy in the university?
21. do students report for taken-for-granted cases like verbal harassments 'lekefa' or stalking or dating harassment?
22. Do you think the university has a swift mechanism to deal with reports of violence?
23. whom do sexual violence victims prefer to report first? You or to university? why?
24. How often do you report your activities to the university? Or you don't report
25. Who are you responsible to/ who are you responsible to reporting to?
26. Do you have any linkages with similar groups or CSOs on campus or out of campus?
 - 26.1. If yes, why?
 - 26.2. If no, why not?

Decision making and leadership

27. How is decision made and leadership exercised?
28. How often females take leadership positions in your network?
29. when you are invited off campus by other CSOs or donors, who is delegated to participate?
30. How is decision made?
31. What is your succession plan when leaders graduate or withdraw?

Challenges and coping mechanisms

1. What challenges have you been facing?
2. How did you cope with those challenges?
3. How have you been affected by COVID-19?
4. Do you think the university's response to COVID-19 to students was adequate?
5. What is your future plan?
6. What do you think should be done by the institution/ the government to solve gender equality issues?

B- key informant interview (subjects from offices in institution)

First of all, I would like to thank you your time and cooperation for this interview. This interview will be kept confidential and will not, in any way, be disclosed to third party. The information you provide will solely be used for a research purpose, not for commercial or any other purpose and it will remain to be anonymous. It will be recorded. You can use either English or Amharic- it is at your discretion. You can stop any time you feel uncomfortable. Can we start?

Organizational set up

1. Have you taken any gender-related course or attended any gender-related training?
2. What information do you have about students' networks (names, numbers, objectives)?
3. How do students form networks? What steps do they follow? How do you support them?
4. Are there any student organization working on gender issues?
5. Does the university have a guideline? If so, how is the role and setup of gender networks articulated in the guideline?

6. Is there any way that students' form networks without strictly following the university's guideline?
7. Are there any thematic restrictions? for example, race, gender, politics, etc
8. what level of support is provided to students' networks by the university?
9. Do you think the university's culture is supportive to students' networks?
10. How do students' networks exercise leadership and decision making?
11. What measure is taken if students informally form networks without the institute's knowledge?
12. What activities do they perform on campus and beyond?
13. What if they execute activities beyond their mandate?
14. what follow-up mechanism is in place to monitor the performances of networks?
15. How often do you receive sexual harassments on campus?
16. Who do the victims prefer to report in case of sexual harassment or attempted rape? why?
17. how often do you receive activity reports from networks?
18. what if they fail to send reports?
19. Is the data gender disaggregated?
20. when student networks fundraise, do they request approval letter from the university?
21. What gaps have you observed on students' networks and on campus at large?
22. Do you feel the university implemented the gender equality policy?
 - 22.1. If no, why not?
23. Do you think students' networks have contribution for the university to realize gender equality?
24. How do you support SLNs to your capacity in helping them achieve their goals? How close are you to these SLNs?
25. Anything you would like to say about the students' networks?

This is the end!

Thank you again for your time

C- Informal Group Discussion/interview- (members of students' networks)

First of all, I would like to thank you your time and cooperation for this interview. This interview will be kept confidential and will not, in any way, be disclosed to third party. The information you provide will solely be used for a research purpose, not for commercial or any other purpose and it will remain to be anonymous. It will be recorded. You can use either English or Amharic- it is at your discretion. You can stop any time you feel uncomfortable. Can we start?

Organizational set up

1. What is your responsibility in the network?
2. Have taken any gender-related course or attended any training on gender?
3. how do you balance engaging in such networks and academic activities? does it affect you academic success?
4. When was it founded?
5. Who founded it?
6. What was the cause for founding it?
7. How was it founded? by following some guidelines or arbitrarily?
8. How many members are there currently?
9. Do you have beneficiaries and members' gender disaggregated data?
10. How do you recruit members? How do you approach them?
11. How do you describe missions, visions, and objectives of your network?

Practices and achievements

1. What activities have you been executing ever since the beginning?
2. Do you feel you achieved your goals?
3. How good is your organization in documentation and learning?
4. What do you understand about activism and advocacy?
5. Do you feel that you are an activist or advocate of gender?
6. What strategy (ies) you use to accomplish your tasks?
7. What level of support do you get in the university?
8. Do you raise fund by yourself?
9. How do you fundraise? what strategies come to play?

10. Do you request approval letter from the institute during fundraising both on and off campus?
11. What is your financial management practice(track record) like?
12. Does Addis Ababa University have a gender equality policy?
13. Do you feel gender inequalities are reduced and gender equality policy is implemented in the university?
14. How helpful is a gender policy for you to accomplish your goals?
15. What can you say about gender based violence on campus?
16. How often do you receive reports of sexual harassment?
17. What do you do if you receive reports of violence or attempted harassment?
18. How common is abortion and unintended pregnancy in the university?
19. Do you think the university has a swift mechanism to deal with reports of violence?
20. Who do sexual violence victims prefer to report first? You or to university? why?
21. How often do you report your activities to the university? Or you don't report
22. Who are you responsible to/ who are you responsible to reporting to?
23. Do you have any linkages with similar groups or CSOs on campus or out of campus?
 - a. If yes, why?
 - b. If no, why not?

Decision making and leadership

1. How is decision made and leadership exercised?
2. How often females take leadership positions in your network?
3. when you are invited off campus by other CSOs or donors, who is delegated to participate?
4. How is decision made?
5. What is your succession plan when leaders graduate or withdraw?
 - a. challenges and coping mechanisms**
 1. What challenges have you been facing?
 2. How did you cope with those challenges?
 3. How have you been affected by COVID-19?

4. Do you think the university's response to COVID-19 to students was adequate?
 - a. 3. What is your future plan?
5. What do you think should be done by the institution/ the government to solve gender equality issues?

Additional questions

In-Depth Interviews

A. Network leaders

1. Could explain the beginning of the network? Who are the founders? What was the triggering event
2. What is the mission, vision, or goal of the network? Who defined these statements?
3. Are you legally registered/legitimacy? Is getting registered helpful for you to achieve your goals?
4. Apart from the Main Campus (Sidist Kilo), presence in any other initiatives or locations?
5. Can I get an outline the organizational structure? Leadership roles, routines? Succession practice?
6. Why collective action? How does the network categorize its members' category/identity (e.g., an inclusive self-categorization, exclusive shared/common goal criteria, sympathizers of the cause etc)?
7. How do you engage with individuals, groups (e.g., clubs, movements, abuse survivors, providers, etc.), authorities, donors?

B. Interview for YM leader and members

1. In trying to understand what feminist communities are, what's the role of exposure to liberal education, observational concept or practical experience?
2. There is a widespread criticism that actually everyone means by communities of practice what they want to mean. How do you deal with the multiplicity of interpretations of the theoretical body of work you have produced?
3. What would be your response if some people think feminism to gender equality is a nice perspective while others happen to condemn and even reveal an intention to launch

counter gender equality perspectives from cultural or religious ground? Is it possible and fruitful to work in alliance with both groups?

4. Who or what are your primary target audience (individuals, family, social group, institutions, systems) you want to influence for the way to promote gender equality?
5. There is a widespread criticism that actually everyone means by communities of practice what they want to mean. How do you deal with the multiplicity of interpretations of the theoretical body of work you have produced?
6. How do you deal with oppressive institutions? Did you observe men/boys shifting from paternalistic responsibilities to egalitarian gender behaviours? What triggers this shift? Can you work together?
7. The social systems you are working with as a movement leader and activist have different, and maybe even conflicting, demands, cultures, religiosity and norms of meaning. Do you experience any tensions as a result of your affiliation with different social identities? And if you do, how do you resolve them?
8. What are your notable achievements so far? Who contributed to that change?
9. Where do you see the future of you movement?

Part II: Group discussion (informal group interview)

1. What was the single most important motivation for your sustained participation as individual and as group?
2. What make you more committed for the movement's cause than that most others will not?
3. How do see the students' dynamism regarding the action's ostensible goals?
4. Why do people continue participating in movements even if it does not effectuate their claims?
5. Drivers of movement commitment /participation strengthen- group identification and collective empowerment feelings of unity and expectations of support?
6. Do all active members come to strategic decisions where they are to agree on strategies that can be used to further that cause.
7. Does self-identification matter to act in line with a social cause? In the student community, how are the active participants identified and compared to bystander people or those who did not engage in a collective action?
8. Explain internal factors that push individuals toward participation.

Interview transcription

A) Key Informants

Students' dean

1. Ermias

Good morning and thank you for this interview

B. you are welcome

A. did you take any training with regard to gender before?

B. No

A. how many student-led clubs are currently active?

B. 40 registered but currently active ones are not more than 12

A. how did they get registered?

B. AAU has a guideline for students to get registered so, based on that we registered them, otherwise we will not register them.

A. what is their organizational structure like male solidarity, girls clubs, yellow movement?

B. Honestly, I don't know yellow movement. But others are hierarchical.

A. is it possible to function for yellow movement on campus without registration?

B. That is my question too. I came to this office only recently. I don't know how they function. They don't come to us for support at all. But I think, they work with gender office.

A. how do students come to leadership positions?

B. they compile proposals, defend it and committee gives them marks and aggregate results will bring them into leadership positions.

A. do you think students' networks are good solutions to reduce violence?

B. definitely, yes. They support the university tremendously. They are students, so victims would be more open to them than to us.

A. what activities basically perform?

B. giving orientations, blood donation, tutorials, and awareness raising

A. how does the university support them?

B. the university tries to support them by registering, giving some funds, rooms, etc.

A. do you think the level of support is enough?

B. I don't really think so.

A. do they report?

B. yes. Every quarter or every six months they report. Failing to report may cause problem during license renewal.

A. do you know AAU gender policy?

B. No. I don't know.

A. What challenges you think networks face?

B. sometimes the academic burden affects their performance. And the institution may not be supportive. Everything may be politicized. And when leaders graduate, the new coming leaders start from scratch.

A. do they have adequate fund?

B. I can't say adequate but they have pocket money like 300 birr/ month.

A. Any thing you would like to add?

B. No. thanks

A. I must say THANK YOU instead. Appreciate!

Gender office

Matebe

First of all, thank you

A- What is your name and responsibility?

B- Matebe Tarekegn, gender office directress

A. How many clubs are working with you in gender related issues?

B. Yellow movement, Male solidarity, etc....

A- What is your relation with these clubs?

B- The mentioned clubs closely work with us and do not work with others. And also female students associations rarely come to us and want to work with us but that doesn't usually happen. For example, **MALE SOLIDARITY**, is engaged in GBV, capacity building to students, gender office provides them financial support and also they raise funds from other NGOs.

A- Do you know that male solidarity is registered and yellow movement is unregistered in the university?

B- Both yellow movement and male solidarity are registered in the university.

A- I just checked the files and confirmed that yellow movement is not registered.

B- In fact, they closely work with us but I don't know.... Yellow movement raises funds, and gives financial support to students.

A- Do you have a follow up mechanism?

B- Student clubs have profiles with us- both yellow movement and male solidarity.

A- What about the gender policy?

B- The policy was formulated and revised with guideline in June 2020. AAU doesn't care about gender equality as long as there is gender office. The higher management is responsible. It needs commitment.

A- Do the female students work with you?

B- Yea, but as structure, they work with students' dean. AAU has anti-harassment law. Their profile is in students' dean.

A. Who is responsible to deal with harassment cases?

B. In Addis Ababa University, there are three committees- **complaint hearing, discipline** and **anti-harassment**, harassment is coordinated by gender office. Harassment committee consists of five members drawn from gender office, students, security, teachers, human resource, etc.... Then anti-harassment committee deals with harassment cases and takes it to the president office for final decision. Then the university's legal service deals with it- either take it to court or make decisions by their own.

A- Do you give them gender skill training to clubs?

B- Good question. Gender comes to the fore but it is misused. People use gender to achieve another agenda. We have a big problem with experts. Cosmetics add-on. AAU center for gender studies is responsible to give training. If we ask them to give capacity building, they say "No". We don't have 'no' connection. The center doesn't respond. Recently, the university is going to blend HIV office with Gender office which is very embarrassing. It is so shameful.

A- Any suggestion in the end.

B- Everyone is responsible to work in gender. Gender should be dealt with the right person. AAU is gender blind.

Thank you!

2. Worknesh Mitiku

A- Name, office and responsibility please?

B- Worknesh Mitiku

A- Women, children and youth office. Responsibility?

B- My position is Gender expert.

A- Hence, no need to ask you about gender issue

B- My experience is teaching. And my background doesn't relate to gender. I was a coordinator in various clubs at school, in elementary schools. Then I was a gender unit coordinator. I took various trainings in gender issues.

A- Let's talk about networks. How many networks are there?

B- Do you mean gender focused?

A- Yes.

B- Yellow movement, male solidarity, I established it in 2007 e.C. I contributed for its establishment. Female students' association.

With regard to structure, clubs are to report to students' dean. But yellow movement and male solidarity are to report to gender office. They are budgeted in gender office. We fought a lot to do this. Female students' assoc. are under students' dean office.

A- Do the students' establish network based on the university guideline?

B- Yes. But it may not be strictly followed. Our response is faster than the students' dean.

A- So is my choice right?

B- Yes, perfect choice.

A- What about their orga. Structure?

B- Hierarchical, female and male solidarity. But yellow movement is flat. Membership is only in law department, and males may not be members but involve as volunteers,

A- What are their main activities?

B- Awareness raising and harassment, sexual violence. We have code of conduct. Male solidarity supports us a lot. The perpetrators should involve in the process, and this is achieved by involving bystanders as stakeholders. We moved to d/nt universities to spur male solidarity. They are active despite covid.

A- AAU has a gender policy but many people do not know it. What challenges them?

B- Bureaucracy affects. Yes. Lack of experts in right offices. This highly affects. There should be tangible effort, then asking for budget, if you don't show result, asking simply for budget is ridiculous. I proposed scholarship and won much money but the money was hijacked. There is always institutional challenge. There should be response. We went to court. Funding is not only from external donors, we can also raise it locally. Most people do not support gender equality issues in the university. Budget is not a problem. Knowing to mobilize and utilizing it is more important. It took us policy guideline five years. Promoting the good works is good. Any challenging the challenges is also important.

A- Let's talk about harassment. What is the referral like? Who they report to and how responsive is the uni?

B- The uni. Has a code of conduct, 5 members, teachers, ss, security, gender and law. The reporting system is we have office in every college campus. We provide them orientation, and tell them where to report. Victims tell the gender director first. The big problem is lack of evidence.

A- Is there any example of measure?

B- Yes. More cases are Student to student and staff to student. The president approves the final decision.

A- Do you receive reports?

B- **The big problem is lack of reporting. Very few cases of harassment are reported. The system is not responsive, no protection.** There would be cases of violence between, staff to staff. PROTECTION IS A BIG CONCERN. Stigma also affects not to report.

Story

A student was raped by unknown person while doing sports. She was 8 months pregnant when she came to us. We took her to her parents but her parents rejected her. We kill her. We brought her back, and then we took her to AWSAD. She delivered safely, continued her education with the support of students' networks. She graduated and succeeded in life. Student networks are very active in harassment.

A- Do they submit activity report? And do they disaggregate?

B- Yes. In every quarter but sometimes they may not report it. They sometimes disaggregate it.

A- Thank you and any suggestion?

B- We very much look forward to working with visionary men who really understand gender issues. It is good to see men involved in gender issues. Thank you.

Students' union

A- Your name and responsibility please?

B- Muleta. Students' union president.

A- Is it under the students' dean? What are its main duties?

B- On students.

A- Have you taken a gender training?

B- No

A- What support do you give clubs?

B- We shorten bureaucracies,

A- How many clubs?

B- Teens , may be 15 or less.

A- What is their structure like?

B- I don't know yellow movement. But I know male solidarity. We work with them closely.

A- Do you know the gender policy?

B- No.

A- Is there violence? Are they reported?

B- Sometimes, yes, we also receive reports of violence, ss to ss, staff to ss. Violence is not reported directly but from secondary sources.

A- How do you deal with it?

B- We use diplomacy. We negotiate them. Very often sexual harassment.

A- What challenges clubs face?

B- Bureaucracy. They should get green light even to use their budget in order to organize an event.

A- Leadership and decision making?

B- This is not only in the uni, it is everywhere. Decisions are always top-down, not participatory. Women are passive in decision making in general.

A- Do you think these clubs age good options?

B- Yes. Students' presence is good in voicing, contributing input. There presence is imperative.

A- Thanks

B- Welcome